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John 6: 1-15

“Are you ‘hangry?’”

Feeding the Five Thousand

6After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ²A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, ‘Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?’ ⁶He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷Philip answered him, ‘Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.’ ⁸One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ⁹‘There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?’ ¹⁰Jesus said, ‘Make the people sit down.’ Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. ¹¹Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹²When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, ‘Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.’ ¹³So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. ¹⁴When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, ‘This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.’

15 When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

One of the most satisfying meals I can recall is the one we shared as a family after 5 days and 4 nights roughing it on a Boundary Waters paddle camping trip 3 years ago. We emerged from the back country tired, ragged, and smelly. But our first stop wasn’t the showers or a comfortable hotel, it was to a café in downtown Ely. We settled into our booths and ordered ice cold pops and gorged on burgers and fries. Those things never tasted so good as they did that day. I’m sure they weren’t even all that fancy of burger and fries. But, because of the days of roughing it with campfire food and cold granola that led up to it, it seemed to be divine.

Little did the folks that gathered with Jesus on the shores of the Sea of Galilee suspect that they were in for a truly divine meal that afternoon. 5,000 people, young, old, male, and female – all of them camped out on the grass and sharing a truly satisfying meal, with a dozen baskets leftover.

This abundant feast was a sign. It was a sign of God's Kingdom, the coming Kingdom where Jesus says, "People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God." (Luke 13: 29). A Kingdom that was foreshadowed by 5,000 people on the grass overlooking the sea. It was a sign of the fullness of Jesus provision for all of us. For as 5,000 were fed with baskets left over, so too Jesus provides for our eternal spirits, as he tells the disciples the very next day, "⁴⁷Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life.⁴⁸ I am the bread of life." (John 6: 47).

As satisfying as it was to eat that plate of food after emerging from the Boundary Waters, it was only a temporary satisfaction. It's like that popular TV commercial from a couple of years ago, when you're so hungry that you get grouchy and angry, and so you become "hangry" (hungry + angry = "hangry"). The joke of the commercial was that you could eat this chocolate bar and it would solve your hangry. But we all know that candy bar is a temporary fix. Four hours after eating that great burger meal in Ely, I can assure you I was hungry once more. But the meal Jesus sets before us, when we abide in him, and commune with him, is eternally satisfying. It doesn't solve our earthly hangry, it meets the eternal needs of our spirits. Just like Jesus told the Woman at the well a couple of chapters earlier "¹⁴but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." Jesus is promising to provide for our eternal hunger, to solve the hangry in us that is looking for something satisfying, with an eternal solution – Him.

And so Jesus is setting before us a table that stretches. It began with 5,000 people sharing baskets, stretched to his disciples gathered at a table the night before his arrest, stretched again to a meal shared with a couple disciples on the road to Damascus, and continues to stretch still to here, in this humble place, on this ordinary Sunday. Here, where our eternal hunger and thirst is satisfied by sharing in the body and blood of Christ at this table. Here, where we share a meal

that truly satisfies, because it quenches our eternal cravings, our spiritual cravings – to be known, to be loved, to be seen, to be forgiven, to be accepted as one of God’s children, to belong, to be gathered into God’s kingdom, seen as one of God’s very own.

Take confidence then, friends, that Jesus provides, Jesus loves, Jesus pours out his very self for the sake of us. And be grateful. Give thanks, and come to the thanksgiving meal we have here this day and receive the gift of this great love anew. All this Jesus does for us. It’s all on him, a free gift of his great love for us. So, what then, are to do?

Maybe you got a chuckle out of the Phillip’s response to Jesus question, “Where are to buy bread for these people to eat?” And all of a sudden you were transported to a church session meeting, trying to solve a seemingly huge problem – “Jesus, it would take 6 month’s wages wouldn’t buy enough bread of each of them to get a little.” And Andrew, “all we have is boy here with 5 loaves, and 2 fishes, but what are they among so many people!?” That’s us, isn’t it? We’re too practical to look beyond what’s reasonable. We’re too conditioned to expect resources to be meager, and for the need’s to be too great. After all, we only have 5 loaves and 2 fishes among us. Does putting them to use really make a difference?

It wouldn’t seem so, it wouldn’t seem to make much of a dent at all. Except when it does...

But Jesus’ calling from the feeding of the 5,000 is to stretch the table. To make what we do here in our church family something that goes beyond these walls. That we’re called to go out into our community and feed the hungry, house the homeless, clothe the naked, and bring the Good News of the grace of God in Jesus Christ to all who are near. What does that look like?

Maybe it looks like the Ridgewater Campus ministry of Jeff Schmitz, who invites area churches into the campus center each week to feed hungry young adults. Where volunteers from our church bring a meal once a week and feed over 100 students each time, as they sit at tables and enjoy Christian fellowship. Where their earthly hunger is fed, yes, but also opportunity is had for the gospel to find its way in their lives.

Maybe it looks like mission trip volunteers from our church traveling to Bdecan church on the Spirit Lake Reservation near Devil's Lake North Dakota refurbishing a food pantry and helping to construct a clothes closet for the people of that place to be fed and clothed. And for the youth of our church to provide for VBS for all the kids that showed up for a week of fun and Christ centered message.

Maybe stretching the table looks like volunteers from our church going out into our neighborhood meeting downtown business people and offering them cookies and hospitality and a gracious greeting, letting them know we're glad to be their neighbor. Or finding folks that need help in their yard, or with their house, and offering them assistance because we feel that the hospitality of God's table includes all our neighbors.

None of these things may seem as grand as feeding 5,000 people on a grassy sea-shore, but just like that meal needed a kid to say, "here, take my 5 loaves and 2 fishes, use them as you need Jesus." It just takes us to say, "Here Lord, here we are with our meager and humble selves sent to serve you and stretch your table further. Show us the way.

This is how the Kingdom of God works. We're invited to bring our meager resources, however insignificant they might seem, and put them into service for the cause of Christ. And when we do, Jesus throws a banquet! He invites all of his friends and fills their plates. He creates a bounteous meal that is so satisfying, there's 12 baskets of leftovers. He is the bread of life, after all.

Do you believe? Are you willing to come to this table today, and to be fed, and bring your meager resources to serve him? Will you take that chance?

Alleluia and Amen.