

John 6:35 ³⁵Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

It was Passover time with all its associations of sacrifice, freedom and feeding. The people believed that when the Messiah came there would be a return of the manna that had fed them in the wilderness. What Jesus is giving is the true bread from heaven – himself. With Jesus, comes the Kingdom of God and through him resurrection and eternal life. Jesus had once told a story about the Kingdom of God being like a great feast. The host summoned his guests, saying, “Come, for everything is ready.” The miracle of the feeding is a celebration of the feast in the Kingdom of God, now. The celebration continues in the worship of the church and will be fulfilled in the last day. Jesus was making a final appeal to the people of Galilee to come and know all their needs met in him. And so he calls us to accept him, the bread of life.

John 6:33 ³³For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the feeding, the crowd saw Jesus as the prophet promised by Moses who, like Moses would deliver them. It was Passover time and it was but a short step in their thinking from seeing Jesus as the Prophet to seeing him as Messiah and wanting to make him king. Not a tyrant like Herod; not a foreign power like Rome; but a king by popular acclaim for which there was a long-standing Jewish tradition. What they did not understand was that Jesus’ kingdom at his first coming was spiritual. He was not the leader of some revolt in the desert. It is to be king of our lives that Jesus was us to make him.

Wholehearted! Savior belovèd and glorious,
Take Thy great power and reign Thou alone,
Over our wills and affections victorious—
Freely surrendered and wholly Thine own.

*Peal out the watchword! Silence it never!
Song of our spirits, rejoicing and free;
True-hearted, whole-hearted, now and for ever!
King of our lives, by Thy grace we will be.*

GREAT THINGS HE HAS TAUGHT US GREAT THINGS HE HAS DONE Lunch – and More John 6:1-15

INTRODUCTION

Early one chilly morning shortly after WWII an American soldier in London was making his way back to the barracks. As he turned the corner in his jeep, he spotted a little lad with his nose pressed to the window of a pastry shop. Inside the cook was kneading dough for a fresh batch of doughnuts. The hungry boy stared in silence, watching every move. The soldier stopped his jeep, got out, and walked over to where the boy was standing. Through the steamed-up window he could see the mouth-watering morsels as the cook placed them onto the glass-enclosed counter. The soldier’s heart went out to the nameless orphan as he stood beside him. “Son ... would you like some of those?” The boy was startled. “Oh, yeah ... I would!” The GI stepped inside and bought a dozen, put them in a bag, and took them out to the boy. He smiled, held out the bag, and said simply: “Here you are.” As he turned to walk away, he felt a tug on his coat. He looked back and heard the child ask quietly: “Mister, ... are you God?”

THE NEED OF A HUNGRY CROWD

A change is coming, but just now Jesus is at the height of his popularity. Jesus went away from the populated areas of Galilee to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. It was a hilly region, known today as the Golan Heights. But the crowds followed him. They had experienced his healing miracles. They had heard his teaching about the kingdom of God. Now it was evening and they were hungry. As they had listened to Jesus speaking about the kingdom of God – i.e. God’s rule in the lives of his people – they were hungry for the reality of that rule. They were thinking of it in a political sense, not a spiritual one. It was Passover time. At Passover the Jews remembered their deliverance from Egypt and Pharaoh’s tyranny. They remembered how God had fed them with manna in the wilderness. Now they were under the tyranny of Rome. Again, they were hungry. They needed delivering and feeding. Many, especially the poor did not have adequate food. Taxation was high and burdensome. They longed for the day when God would deliver them and that day was often depicted as a feast, an abundant food supply to which all would have fair access.

Isa 25:6 ⁶ On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.

Our world still has its hungry people. Hungry people who are also oppressed. There is a hunger crisis unlike anything that has been seen in more than 50 years. 925 million people are hungry. Every day, almost

16,000 children die from hunger-related causes. That's one child every five seconds. In one year, nearly 9 million children can die before they reach their fifth birthday. When Jesus saw the great crowd, he had compassion on them. Do we have the same compassion? Let us be generous in our food drive to celebrate Harvest and Thanksgiving and meet some of the need of the hungry.

A hungry, scantily clothed little boy was crying pathetically. "I'm cold, I'm hungry!" he whimpered. A stranger approached him and asked, "Do you believe that God can take care of you?" "Yes," replied the starving little boy with assurance. "Why, then does He not send someone to bring you warm clothing and some food?" "I know, sir, that He asked someone to do it, but I guess this somebody has forgotten it."

THE OFFERING TO MEET THE NEED

Realizing the great need, Jesus takes the initiative, as he often did. He asks Philip where they are going to get enough food to feed so many people. We call this miracle the feeding of the 5000. That was just the number of men. With the women and children who would also have been present the crowd could have been as many as 20,000. Jesus knew the answer to his question; he knew what he was going to do. Here in John's version of the story Jesus is very much center-stage. He takes the initiative. He knows what he is going to do. He, himself, distributes the bread and fish. (The other Evangelists say the distribution was by the apostles.) Neither Philip nor Andrew is able to answer Jesus' question. They only think in terms of supply and demand. There is neither the money nor the food to feed so many people. We must not spiritualize this story. It is true that Jesus can meet every need. That includes food and drink. Jesus has taught us to pray for our daily bread. In a few moments we are going to eat real bread and drink real wine.

God, our Maker, doth provide
for our needs to be supplied.

The problem of hunger is not due to God's lack of provision or his insensitiveness to human need. The problem is man's greed. Philip is at a loss, but Andrew is more hopeful. Here is something positive: a boy's picnic lunch. It consists of five small barley loaves (made from the cheapest grain available) and two fish, probably pickled; the kind the rich would eat as hors d'oeuvres, but here the food of the poor. Even while making the suggestion, Andrew realizes the futility of it. **What are they for so many?** But the boy had offered them and Andrew had taken his offering to Jesus.

Once a week the road-sweeper came by with his brush. He was a friendly old fellow; and Miss Gidding, at The Hollies, got into the habit all that summer of taking him a glass of lemonade and a slice of cake. He thanked her shyly, and that was all. But one evening there came a knock at the back door of The

Hollies. The road-sweeper was there, a cauliflower in one hand, a bunch of sweet peas in the other. He seemed embarrassed as he said, 'I've brought you these, Ma'am—for your kindness.'

'Oh, but you shouldn't,' exclaimed Miss Gidding. 'It was nothing.'

And then the road-sweeper said an odd thing. 'Well, no,' he agreed, 'may be it wasn't much, really, Ma'am. But it was more than anybody else did.'

Although Jesus takes the initiative, he involves others in ministry. In following Jesus the disciples have to take responsibility. His questions are intended to lead them to propose a plan of action. The boy's offering, so little, given to Jesus, met the need of the hungry crowd.

I was sent an e-book, *Healthy Church, Healthy Systems*. In the chapter on attracting people and drawing them into the church it says: "God is the one doing the attracting and the drawing." Then asks why it seems that God is drawing people to some churches and not others. It then goes on to remind us that we have our part to play: a direct mail campaign, personally inviting people, bringing our friends to special occasions. It says, "We have to do our part to let people know we are in town and ready to receive them."

However small our offering or our contribution, God cannot use it until we give it to him.

THE MIRACLE TO SATISFY THE NEED

John 6:11 ¹¹Jesus then 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.

Jesus ordered the people to sit down. There must be no mad rush for the food. Not only did Jesus get them to sit down but he organized them in groups so that all could easily be served. Jesus gave thanks for the food. That is what we should always do; recognize that God is the ultimate provider of all our food.

As Thou didst bless the loaves and fishes, bless, Lord, the food upon these dishes. And as the sugar hides in the tea, may our lives be hid, O Lord, in Thee.

For cream buns and buttered toast, praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

What did Jesus say? Probably the traditional Jewish grace:

Blessed art Thou, O Lord, King of the universe, who bringest forth bread from the earth.

Then breaking up the bread and fish, Jesus began to distribute the food until everyone was fed and everyone had had enough. There was even plenty left over.

The miracle is not just a demonstration of Jesus' power or an expression of his compassion. It is a sign of Jesus' gift of the bread of life.