

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

July 29, 2018, The 10th Sunday After Pentecost/The 17th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Psalm 14, John 6:1-21

FED

This past year our Sunday School children were learning about Jesus feeding of the 5,000 people. Their teachers wanted them to get a sense of how many 5,000 people were. They did this with 5,000 small smiley faced stickers. Denise even took pictures of the kids and made stickers of their faces, so that they could be included in the count. It took a good part of their hour together for those 12-14 children to create a poster of 5,000 smiling people.

They got a sense of Jesus' miracle, by realizing how long it took to put 5,000 faces on a piece of poster board. That poster was up in our parking lot entry for quite a few weeks, so if you remember it, you too got to have a sense of what 5,000 people look like.

Now the reality of this story is that there were even more people than the 5,000. As the author of Matthew's gospel put it: "And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children." If we add in the "besides women and children," there were actually more like 25,000 to 30,000 people fed that day beside the Sea of Galilee.

[Based on research by Megan McKenna in *Not Counting Women and Children* (Orbis, 1994), the ratio of women and children to adult men would be 5 to 1 or 6 to adult men.

See <https://perspectivesjournal.org/posts/not-counting-women-children/>

Now I'm not going to get out stickers and have you spend the rest of the hour making posters. But I did try to think of a way we could picture how many people were fed. If you imagine all of the population of East Moline and Silvis combined, and sitting beside the Mississippi River at Ben Butterworth Parkway, you can begin to get a sense of the numbers.

Or if we filled up the TaxSlayer Center, or whatever you call it: the I-Wireless Center, or the Mark, you'd just over 9,000 people if all the seats were filled. So we'd need to fill up the arena and empty it over three times to reach the number of people fed by Jesus that evening along the Sea of Galilee.

More people were fed that evening than had ever been fed before by a single person.

And not only does the gospel writer of John want you to know this.

This story of the Feeding on the hillside was such an important story for the earliest followers of Jesus, that it was included in all four of the gospels. It is the only story of Jesus that shows up in all four of the gospels.

Jesus was the Savior who cared about hungry people.

He didn't just care about their spiritual lives

he cared about them as people

who got stranded far from town late one afternoon

and didn't have enough to eat.

After Jesus had died on the cross and been resurrected to new life and ascended to heaven his followers told the stories of who he was.

This story of the Feeding was important to them

because it was a miracle that told them who Jesus was,

and because as they told it they realized they were hearing echoes of the story of the Last Supper.

The gospel writers, and all those who told the stories of Jesus, were followers of Jesus who took bread,

both the bread of the Passover meal at the Last Supper,
and the 5 barley loaves given by a young boy on that hillside,
and he blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his followers, saying take and eat.

This is the reason that I talked with the children this morning about the Communion Meal we will celebrate together next Sunday.

In telling this story, John and the other three gospel writers, make sure that we realize that when Jesus gives to us, he gives in abundance. Jesus multiplied the bread and fish so that people could eat as much as they wanted.

John says that they ate until they were satisfied.

Then all the extra was gathered up so that nothing was wasted and there was an abundance left over, 12 baskets full of bread and fish.

I learned this week that when Jesus' followers told this story of the Feeding of the 5,000 Men, or 25-30,000 men, women and children, they didn't tell the story alone. With the exception of Luke's gospel they told the story with the rest of the story we read this morning in John.

When they talked about Jesus feeding that massive crowd of people, they also included what happened next.

Jesus could sense that the people wanted to make him the King because of this amazing miracle.

That was not the reason Jesus came.

He didn't come to be a king who conquered the Romans, so he slipped away from the crowd.

His disciples then headed back across the Sea of Galilee in their boat, but the sea was rough because a strong wind was blowing. They were three or four miles from the shore when Jesus came walking across those rough seas to them and they of course were terrified.

But Jesus said to them, "It is I, do not be afraid." And their boat safely reached the other shore.

Not only did Jesus feed a huge multitude of hungry people but he brought peace and calm to the disciples on the rough and stormy sea.

And there is another part of this story, in how Jesus answered the disciples as he walked toward them. Jesus' answer to their cries of "Who is it?" wasn't exactly the translation we have in our Bibles this morning which read: "It is I; do not be afraid."

If you looked at the small notation in your Bibles as you read along this morning, what Jesus literally said was: "I am, do not be afraid."

You may remember that the name "I am" is the name that God used when Moses came to the burning bush. God was sending him to lead the Israelites out of slavery, and Moses asked, "but who will I say has sent me?" God answered, "Tell the Israelites that the God of their ancestors has sent you, and my name is "I am." "This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations." (Exodus 3)

So when Jesus came toward those frightened disciples on that stormy Sea of Galilee he was literally saying to them, "It is I, your God, "I am," who is coming to you. Do not be afraid." If they had any question about who their teacher was, he answered it that night on the stormy sea, he was God in their midst.

The gospel writers reach forward to us this morning with a message about Jesus who did amazing miracles nearly 2,000 years ago along the Sea of Galilee and on the Sea of Galilee.

The story may be 2,000 years old, but the message is a living truth for us gathered here this morning:

It is a message for us in the places in our lives where we are hungry and far from home and needing to be fed.

It is a message for us when we are unsure of the future.

It is a message for us when we are worried about our children and their needs.

It is a message for us when we are lost and scared on stormy seas.

It is a message for us in all the seasons of our lives,
and with all that we carried with us into the sanctuary this morning.

Jesus comes to us with loving abundance, with enough to feed our hungers this day and in the days ahead.

Jesus comes to us with the power to calm the storms of life, and offer us peace.

Jesus is our God who comes to be with us,

saying, "I am," do not be afraid,"

"take and eat, and live in my abundance."

It is given to you, in love.