



# Deering Community Church

Pastor: Barbara Luckett Currie

YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT

Sermon for 7-31-2011

Scripture: Matthew 14:13-21

Today's Gospel lesson is "Feeding the 5000". This is the only story that is repeated in each of our four gospels—with only minor variation. In fact it is told five times, twice in the book of Matthew; however, in the second Matthew version it is only 4000 to be fed! Let me set the scene for our Matthew reading today: things have not been going well. At the end of the previous chapter Jesus' hometown people rejected him, resulting in his not doing deeds of power there, because of their unbelief. Next he hears that John the Baptist, his cousin, the one who spent his life preparing the way for Jesus, and the one that also baptized Jesus had been murdered by Herod. I can imagine the grief Jesus was feeling at this great loss. No wonder he wanted to withdraw, to go to a desolate place to have some time alone.

Do any of you remember Andrew Lloyd Weber's, musical, *Jesus Christ, Superstar*, where there is a scene of sick people coming to Jesus asking to be healed. As the crowd gets bigger and more animated, Jesus' attempts to heal them become more frantic until finally, he separates himself from them and cries out "heal yourselves!" Who hasn't felt like this at times? Who, especially if we take the brokenness and need of the world seriously, hasn't felt overwhelmed and unable to give enough or be enough for what is needed.

Despite Jesus hoping to get away for some quiet time, when he reaches the other side of the lake, the crowds are already there. Jesus has compassion and ministers to them. As the time gets late, the disciples note the hunger of the people and suggest to Jesus that they send the people away to find their own food. Jesus responds, "Don't send them away; you give them something to eat!" He asks about



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what resources they have. The story goes that the disciples tell Jesus that they have 5 loaves and two fish. Jesus takes this food, blesses it, breaks the bread and gives it to the disciples to distribute. We are also told that the disciples were on clean up duty—after all ate, there were 12 basketfuls left over, one basket for each of the disciples.

Was this a miracle? What is a miracle? The American Heritage dictionary says, “An event that appears inexplicable by the laws of nature and so is held to be supernatural in origin or an act of God.” I wonder how many of you believe in that type of miracle. We often use the word miracle to express something very amazing that has happened. Many scholars have suggested over the years, that as the disciples started to feed the crowd, others simply opened their hearts and began to share the food that they had brought with them. Barbara Brown Taylor says that most of these folks probably had something to eat in their pockets. Because it was not enough to share, they kept the food hidden, maybe hoping to go off by themselves where no one was looking and take a bite; however, when that basket of bread came around, full of scraps, “everyone was so careful not to break off too much, everyone wanting Jesus’ crazy idea to work so much that very carefully, very secretly, they all began to put their own bread in the basket, reaching in as if they were taking some out and leaving some behind instead, so that the meal grew and grew.<sup>1</sup> Now some would call this happening a miracle, a miracle of moving from scarcity to abundance. Others of you are probably thinking, “But that is not a miracle. That’s just people being generous with each other.” For me people sharing what they had is no less a miracle than if Jesus multiplied the food by himself. A

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Seeds of Heaven*, p. 31.



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miracle? Or not? You see Jesus believed that where there was plenty of God there would be plenty of everything else. (Taylor)

I want to share with you a modern day true “Feeding the 5000” story. It happened about thirteen years ago, and I remember reading about it at that time and was thrilled to see it this week in one of my internet readings.

After months of hard work and years of saving, the day came for Reb and Jackay to open their own restaurant. All that was needed was the final health inspection and the issuing of their business permit. That was scheduled for first thing that morning; then "Our Place," as they called their restaurant would be in business.

But that morning the winds and rains of Hurricane Hugo hit, unexpectedly making its way 200 miles inland to their North Carolina town. Trees were uprooted, power lines were down, homes and stores were destroyed. Reb and Jackay hurried to their restaurant. Everything was intact.

A deputy sheriff pulled up and told them that their restaurant, the fire station next door and a service station down the road were the only ones that had electricity. Reb and Jackay called the health inspector to come immediately so they could open, but because of the power outage, he couldn't get into his office to issue the permit. No permit, no business opening. With a refrigerator stocked with 300 pounds of bacon and beef and

bushels of tomatoes

They told the deputy, "Tell your coworkers and other emergency people you see that we'll have free BLT's and coffee for anybody who wants to drop by." Soon firemen, policemen, linemen and other workers were filing into Our Place. When the couple heard that another restaurant was scalping people by charging ten dollars for two eggs, toast and



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bacon, they placed a sign in their window: FREE BLT'S-- FREE COFFEE. Families, travelers and street people were welcomed.

Then something began to happen. People started to clean counters and sweep floors. Volunteers took over the dish washing from Jackay and helped Reb at the grill. Hearing about what was going on at Our Place from the local radio station, people from a neighboring town that had not been too badly hit by the storm brought food from their freezers. Stores and dairies sent over chicken, milk and foodstuffs of all kinds. And so the long day went. Those first cups of coffee and BLT's somehow stretched to 16,000 meals. The restaurant's small stock increased by 500 loaves of bread, cases of mayonnaise, 350 pots of coffee and bushels of produce.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus said, "You give them something to eat." Does it matter if we see this as a miracle of Jesus or a miracle of hard work by the disciples and the generosity of the crowd? I think it does. If we limit the miracle to Jesus, I end up wondering why God does not create this miracle amongst the poor and hungry of our world. Where is Jesus' miracle in Somalia or Sudan or for the children in Hillsboro/Deering? Seeing this as a miracle of Jesus' divine power asks nothing of us, and frankly, in a very real way, it limits Jesus' power to the past. The trouble with waiting for Miracles is that we are leaving things to God rather than getting in there and making things happen with our labor, our resources, our creativity, and God's blessing. However, if we see this story as the miracle of selfish hearts turned into compassionate, generous hearts, we leave with at least a wondering about where we are in the story and what we can do. We are surrounded by so much need. Sometimes it seems impossible to

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<sup>2</sup> "A grand opening", *Connections*, 18th Sunday of the Year, August 1, 1999



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make a difference in our world; it's easier to just hold back and pray for that miracle. My belief is that with God's help and the help of each other, there is no end to what we can do.

Listen to Jesus; imagine he is talking to us, not just to the disciples of long ago. Jesus says, "Bring what you have to me. However much you have, just bring it to me and believe it is enough to get started." This reminds me when Jeanne Bartlett and I had gotten so excited about the homeless projects that we were planning with the Ministerium churches in Hillsboro. We had not really figured out about where the money was going to come from to buy the food for the bags and the dinners. I think Jeanne wrote in her letter to you all that maybe Outreach had overreached. To start off Jeanne with Bud's support decided to fast some each week and give the dollars saved to the project. Stu Huggard was eager to go to Sam's Club and buy provisions. And then later many of you signed up to pledge monthly for the project or donate goods or time. Now, thanks to both church and community members, we have more than enough to see these projects through for the next year.

The loaves and the fish—does anyone know how it happened for sure? When Jesus told the disciples to not send the crowd away but to feed them, he asked what food was available and then said, "Bring them here to me." We are not alone. We too are invited to bring what we have to God. Together we can accomplish great things.

I would like to close with a beautiful summary of our Gospel reading in the poetry of Thom Shuman called *ENOUGH*

there was more than enough  
grief for Jesus,  
hearing the news  
that beloved John



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had lost his head  
to Herod;

there was more than enough people  
when all those folks,  
men, women, children  
(the press reported more than 5000)  
crowded after him;

there was more than enough  
hunger  
following each person,  
gnawing away at their hopes and dreams;

there was more than enough  
doubt  
feeding the fears  
of his disciples,  
whining for Jesus  
to send everyone packing;

but what they did have  
was more than enough  
for Jesus -  
taking,  
blessing,  
breaking,  
transforming  
their paltry panic  
into manna's joy.

when we look into  
our picnic basket of scarcity,  
murmuring,  
'not enough money,  
not enough people,  
not enough time,



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not enough energy,  
notenoughnotenoughnotenough'

remind us, Overflowing Grace,  
that it is all Jesus  
needs.  
AMEN, AMEN