

Courage
Mark 6:30-44
Colebrook Congregational Church
July 19, 2015 / Ordinary 16

Jesus feeding the five thousand usually reminds me of an incident during my first tour in AmeriCorps. I was with the kindergarteners and first graders at recess in a small courtyard formed by the structure of the elementary school. Ten classes with at least twelve students each, and it was a hot day, nearly the start of their summer break. The teachers on duty stepped away to gather supplies for the next activity, leaving me and a couple of TAs in charge. Then suddenly out of nowhere, one of my teammates appeared in the courtyard. This teammate was not known for making good decisions. That day, she decided it was a good idea to go to recess with over 120 kids, give popsicles to only the twelve from her assigned classroom, and then walk back inside. The TAs and I were at first flabbergasted by this, but that was quickly replaced with terror as we faced a pint-sized riot of the little kids who did not receive popsicles. We eventually found more, and treated them all, and the teammate offered no explanation, and we carried on with our day.

Today's selection follows those from the last couple weeks. The chapter starts with Jesus' rejection in Nazareth by those who knew Him, then Jesus sends out the twelve on a mission, then King Herod executes John the Baptist. On the other side our selection, following this miracle of feeding so many, Jesus goes on to walk on water, then travels to Gennesaret where he heals many.

So, leading into this miracle story, Jesus & the Disciples had been very busy and they needed a break. Like any one of us. They try to get away to a deserted place by land and by lake, but they were too famous now, and they were sighted and they were followed into that deserted place. Once Jesus recharged a bit, He went to that gathered crowd and started to teach them. It was soon late, and concerned about their well being, the Disciples want them to disperse to go eat. But Jesus says that they should feed them. The Disciples, as usual, are confused. They ask if they should take 200 denarius to go buy food. A denarii, a Roman coin, represented a day's wage of a laborer, and 200 of them could feed a family of four for a whole year in that time.

Then, Jesus has them check their inventory. Five loaves and two fish. And those loaves back then were roughly the size of a baker's roll. Just that for 13 people. Back in that day, it was common practice to eat breakfast at home, then carry food around with them for the rest of the day for the later meal. That's why they had that food with them.

Then, the Disciples organized the crowd. Jesus then blessed that small amount of food, relative to their 13 bellies, by looking to the heavens and praying. This was a common practice. Where we bow our heads to pray, back then, they prayed by looking upward. Then the Disciples shared their food, and they found that they had much food left over.

Most assume that the miracle here is that Jesus multiplied the amount of bread and fish. But the text doesn't say that. The Gospels can be pretty specific about Jesus' actions with the miracles. Jesus turned the jugs of water into wine. Jesus spit into mud and used it to cure blindness. Jesus whispered words and raised the dead. Very specific actions causing very specific events, spelled out clearly for us. We don't have that here in the same way. It does not say that Jesus multiplied the food, it says that Jesus gave a blessing and then started to share what food they had.

It would have been easier, probably, to have just multiplied the food using His divine power. It could have been just another demonstration and validation of Jesus as the Word of God. But as we all know, Jesus doesn't usually do things the easy way. I believe that the miracle here instead comes from that act of sharing by Jesus.

I do not believe that Jesus used His divine power to create more food to appear. There was already food there. Some probably had food in abundance, some probably had just enough, and to be sure, some did not have any or enough. After many hours of teaching them, and we can be probably guess with some certainty what sort of things Jesus was teaching them, and then seeing Jesus putting action to His words, showing them that He actually lives the way He says. That was sure to be inspirational to them, seeing Him share His food with them after spending so much time teaching them. So, I

believe that seeing that, the crowd shared their food with one another. Like a giant potluck supper.

This was a miracle without divine intervention. Just courage. Courage to be the first to share from oneself, to put themselves out there. Leading by example. Jesus had the courage of belief to start sharing, confident that others would follow suit. And that is the true lesson of this story, I believe. To have the courage to put action to belief or teachings, especially if you would be the first to do so, and in front of many eyes.

One of my favorite stories to illustrate this episode from Jesus' life is Stone Soup.

A soldier, returning from war, walked into a village. The villagers saw him coming, and fearing he would pillage or beg, hid their food. When he encountered the villagers, they immediately told him that they had nothing, so he should just keep walking. But he was really hungry. The easy options would have been if he just walked to the next village or he could have probably intimidated someone into giving up some food. But like Jesus, he did not take the easy way.

He opened his pack and took out his pot and a stone, asking only for water. The villagers figured they could give him that.

They became curious when he put the stone into the water-filled pot, and he told them that he was making stone soup, his favorite. After a little bit, he said that if he had some vegetables, it would hit the spot, and he offered to share the soup with whomever added veggies to the pot. Some of the villagers produced veggies.

The same thing happened with potatoes, and spices, and herbs, and meat. Eventually, they had a soup that would feed the whole village, made from little bits that each offered to the pot.

Like Jesus, the soldier had the courage to not take the easy way, having the confidence of belief that his actions in front of the whole village would lead

to the positive result.

At this time of transition, where the eyes of our community are upon us, we should ask ourselves, do we have that same courage that Jesus had before that crowd of 5000? Our community can hear our words, but do they see us follow it up with similar deeds? Do we have the courage to put ourselves out there and work in concert with others? The courage to take up an active role in serving Colebrook once again? The courage to try new things, even though they may fail, but we go for it anyway with the confidence of our beliefs? And the courage to share what we have, to feed our hungry neighbors?

I believe we do.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

[PAUSE]

Lord God, friend of those in need, your Son Jesus has untied our burdens and healed our spirits. We lift up the prayers of our hearts for those still burdened, those seeking healing, those in need within the church and the world. We pray that you guide the hands of caregivers, giving them the strength and guidance they need to help their charges. We pray for those who keep us safe, in our homes, on the streets, or on battlefields far away, bringing them home to their families safely as well. We pray that you give us the courage and affections to be instruments of your love in this world.

We especially pray for:

O God, Hear our prayers, that we may love you with our whole being and willingly share the concerns of our neighbors. Amen.