

“A Prayer And A Lesson”

In the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace.

The early church certainly liked this story. It is the only miracle other than the resurrection, the Easter story of Jesus rising from the dead, that is recorded in all four gospels. At least a zillion sermons have been preached on it. Sermons about miracles in general, sermons about Jesus' remarkable appeal as crowds traipsed around the countryside after him, sermons about Jesus' compassion, sermons about our role in God's work. Jesus gave the food to the disciples who then distributed it to the crowd, "Go, thou, and do likewise." The always reliable focus on the generosity and unselfishness of that one little boy of whom we read in the Gospel of John's account of the event. There are any number of sermons here in today's gospel reading of the miracle of the loaves and fishes.

The disciples had come back to Jesus after their mission to the countryside. Two by two they had gone out, preaching and healing. Now they have returned for a debriefing retreat, telling Jesus about successes and failures, sorrows, and joys. It is this moment, we hear the story of the miraculous meal. Why? Why here? Why now? I think the answer is one that will speak to any of us when we are concerned that what we bring to a particular task may be inadequate.

Listen again to the disciples. "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

Jesus says, "No, they can stay. You feed them."

"What? We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish, and that is not enough!"

Lord, only five loaves of bread and two fish. Lord, only five loaves and two fish. That is the response of the ages when people feel overwhelmed by the task confronting them.

We all feel that way at times. The parents worried about guiding the children on the right path despite all the pressures to stray. "What are we to do? We have only five loaves of bread and two fish." The laid off worker who struggles to survive in a difficult economy. "I have only five loaves of bread and two fish." The spouse who is desperately trying to make a go of a trouble marriage, but knowing nowhere to turn to rekindle the passion. "I have only five loaves of bread and two fish."

Certainly that was the response of the disciples when the crowds followed them on their retreat with Jesus. Jesus says, "You give them something to eat."

What? We only have five loaves of bread and two fish."

Fortunately for the twelve, and for us, Jesus intervenes. He says softly, "Bring them here to me and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve baskets of broken pieces that were left over.

Friends, there is the good news for anyone feeling inadequate in the face of the pressures of life. The answer is, "No, we often do not have what it takes." At best, in the face of overwhelming odds, we only have five loaves of bread and two fish. But we have a friend who whispers, "Bring them to me."

My brothers and sisters in Christ. Remember this the next time you encounter a moment when life seems so big and you feel so small, heading off into the dreary desert of the day-to-day. Remember, someone is so close who can do what you and I cannot do, someone who can take our paltry little handful of loaves and fish and turn them into a feast. Again, Jesus whispers, "Bring them to me," and suddenly, miraculously even, our little becomes a lot. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.