



Assembly 2023 Closing Sermon

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Mark 6: 30-44

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.' But he answered them, 'You give them something to eat.' They said to him, 'Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?' And he said to them, 'How many loaves have you? Go and see.' When they had found out, they said, 'Five, and two fish.' Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

Grace and peace.

This well-known text can be looked at in a lot of ways. Of course it is a miracle story. Or you can look at it as a math problem. Twelve disciples with five loaves and two fish. 5000 people to feed. Multiplied by a miracle, we will call x . Divided and eaten in the amount of Y , equals 12 baskets of leftovers.

I think my favourite interpretation of this text is that perhaps the sharing of the 5 loaves and 2 fish *IS* the miracle. I think that the crowd is moved by seeing the disciples scrounging for their meager supplies. So someone finds they have a piece of cheese, someone has some olives, someone else has some dried meat and someone else has some wine, and one by one people bring forward what they have been hoarding and it becomes a giant potluck with 12 baskets left over.

It is like the greening of the hearts of the crowd—maybe that's the miracle, that Jesus is able to bring out the best in those present, the generous, giving selfless best.

But there is more. I think perhaps the most important part of the text is when the disciples say 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.' They want to be off the hook. They see trouble coming and they want to avoid it. But Jesus turns around and says 'You give them something to eat.'

You give them something to eat. You do it. It reminds me of the story of the raising of Lazarus. There after Lazarus comes out of the tomb, Jesus tells his disciples, you unbind him;

You unbind him. You do it.

It was all fine and good to depend on Jesus to do everything when he was with them, but Jesus was preparing them for the time he would not be there. Not that he ever abandons them, in fact we know his promise to be with them, and us, until the end of time.

But as Jesus called disciples, they were being trained to carry on Jesus' ministry after his time on earth.

We are Jesus' called disciples. And now Jesus calls and asks us the same thing. You do it. You address climate change. You feed the hungry. You take a stand on colonization. You help those unjustly imprisoned. You unbind those who are captured. You help those with addictions. You spread the gospel. You bring youth back into the church. You share the love of Jesus. You do it.

And it can feel overwhelming. How can we do all these things? How can I do all these things?

The reality is Jesus isn't asking an individual to feed or unbind. He is asking a community, first of the disciples and then of the gathered crowd.

I saw this posted on Instagram a while ago: Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly now. Love mercy now. Walk humbly now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.

You are not obligated to complete the work. I like that. But working together as a community, working together Lutherans and Anglicans and Moravians we can do more together than we could ever ask or imagine.

Remember, Jesus calls us to be disciples, but calls us to be faithful, not necessarily successful! Let me elaborate on that with this prayer by Thomas Merton.

My Lord God,

I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end, nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

—"The Merton Prayer," by Thomas Merton

Jesus says to us, you do it, but Jesus does not leave us to do it alone. Jesus tells us let there be greening, but have you noticed how the greening in spring happens? It's hardly noticeable at first! It happens a little bit at a time.

Together as Anglicans and Lutherans and now Moravians, let's do our best to be those disciples who start out with 5 loaves and 2 fish and end up witnessing a miracle. *Amen.*