

Rappahannock Christian Church – 7/31/11

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Communion Meditation

You know, it's really hard to satisfy the farmers. It's either too wet or too dry. They just are so fully dependant on weather conditions! They experience times of plenty and times of want in very tangible ways.

Life is like that. We know tragedy and we experience joy. The Bible tells us plainly that Jesus never leaves us. He is with us through it all. This Table provides the very best proof that this is true. Christ died for you and for me. Astounding, when you think about it! There is no better proof that God is going to be by our side always, no matter what happens. Let these Elements serve as a reminder of God's great love and faithfulness! Let me read you the words that the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 – For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

“Why’d He Do That?”

This morning’s Scripture passage comes from Matthew 14. It is the well-known story of Jesus' feeding the five thousand.

Matthew 14:13-21 – When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “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 replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

“We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered.

“Bring them here to me,” he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

This is one of those passages of Scripture that I cannot read without thinking of an event in my life. Perhaps some of you have Scriptures that remind you of specific moments or events, as well.

It happened when I was probably 17 or 18 years of age. I went to the church that my mother was attending at that time and this was the passage that they were studying in the Sunday School class I attended. The person who was teaching said that what we have here is a story about how Jesus' compassion and generosity were infectious, and all those people were inspired to share their lunches with those who hadn't brought any. So there really was no miracle, you see, it was all about sharing.

Now it's true that sometimes "miracles" are all about timing, and are not supernatural events. But in this case Jesus is performing a miracle, and his doing so is the central point of the story. If we try to focus on something else, we're not going to hear God's message.

Peter said at Pentecost that Jesus was "accredited" to the Jewish people by signs and miracles. In a way, that is what is going on here. We could see, in the feeding of the 5000, one more proof of Jesus' power; one more occasion when Jesus proved that He was truly sent by God. It's very much like those times when the voice speaks out of heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him." This miracle says as much, only it does so without words.

But I don't believe that this is all. The feeding of the 5000 is not just another miracle to show Jesus' power, or to show that He is speaking the truth. It is more than that. It is also the fulfillment of a prophecy given long ago to Moses. God told Moses (in Deuteronomy 18) that one day He would raise up from among the Jewish people, "a prophet like you." God would put words in his mouth which he would speak to the people. And now, here is Jesus, out in a remote place miraculously feeding people with food provided by God. Does this sound familiar? It should! It's the story of Moses, feeding the people in the wilderness with the food God provided! In his actions, Jesus is showing that he is the "Prophet like Moses" that the people were expecting.

Do you remember what the religious leaders asked John the Baptist? They asked, "Are you the Prophet?" Haven't you ever wondered why they asked this? Well, they were asking John if he was the "Prophet like Moses" who was to come one day. John responded by saying that he was not the long-awaited person of prophecy. But Jesus *IS* the Prophet like Moses. His feeding of the 5000 is proof of this, for those who have ears to hear and eyes to see.

So the question for the Jews who experienced this should have been, "Exactly what is this New Moses up to? What does He want from us? What is He proclaiming?"

The message Jesus proclaims is not part of the story of the feeding of the 5000. We have to look at the whole body of Jesus' teaching and preaching to see that.

Actually, it helps to know that, just a short time later, Jesus refers to this event Himself. He gets into a boat with His disciples and warns them to "Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." The disciples think he is annoyed with them for not provisioning the boat with some bread. But he corrects them. He reminds them of how he fed the 5000, and tells them that the "yeast" of the Pharisees that they need to beware of is their wrong, misguided teaching.

The Pharisees had misrepresented and misinterpreted God's intentions. And this is the crux of the story of the feeding of the 5000. It is about how Jesus, the Prophet like Moses, is introducing people to a new Way, a New Covenant. Contrary to what the Pharisees seem to be saying, it is *NOT* God's intent to keep "unworthy sinners" out of His Kingdom. It is *NOT* God's intent to eternally condemn all but a few exceptionally pious Jews! The Pharisees have said that only when Israel is found by God to be strictly obeying the Mosaic Law 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, will God send the Messiah and establish His eternal, righteous Kingdom. "And, by the way," the were arrogantly insisting, "YOU are NOT going to have any part in it! And neither are YOU or YOU or YOU! You're all sinners, and God wants nothing to do with you!!!!"

How many times, we might ask, will this test of righteousness need to be made, and how many times will the Jewish nation fail the test, before the Pharisees, and others like them, realize that

what they're looking for is NEVER going to happen? The only way for God's people to be pure and righteous is for God, in His mercy, to forgive them. He must arrange some way for atonement to be made for their sins.

Jeremiah, the Old Testament prophet, announced God's plan hundreds of years before Jesus was born. "I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel," God said. "It will not be like the Old Covenant, with my laws written on tablets of stone. I will put my Law, my Way, in their hearts!" God's remedy for sin was to be accomplished not by outward obedience to a law code. It was going to have to be an inward work of God's grace.

At just the right time in God's plan Jesus appeared and made his bold announcement: "The time has come. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the Good News." Jesus says that the era of God's gracious forgiveness has begun. Anyone who comes to God for mercy will find it!

Who can believe such things? Could God really want to gather a people to Himself who don't deserve it? Would God really cleanse sinners, making them whole and pure, just because they begged for mercy?

What credentials does this Jesus have, anyway? Why should we believe Him? He is certainly not teaching the things which the Pharisees and the other religious leaders are teaching. How can we tell whether or not this Jesus is telling the truth? How could God validate Him, accredit Him, so that we will believe?

The feeding of the 5000 is intended to serve as one of those proofs! That is what this story is about. In this miracle, God is validating His Son. He is saying that Jesus is the One they have been looking and waiting for. He is the Prophet, the New Moses, and He is bringing in a New Covenant - a covenant of grace. You can trust His words, and believe that what He claims is true! God has done it all!

This brings us to our own day – 2011 later.

God still calls us to accept and embrace the Good News. He does not drive people away from Him. God calls people to come to Him! He is rich in mercy and forgiveness. All we have to do is to respond and receive salvation through His Son.

Benediction

Now to Him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen. – Ephesians 3:20-21