

Usually in sermons I start with something about today and then relate it back to the Bible. I do it that way because you are well educated and critical thinkers. I can't just say, "Believe this because the Bible says so... and I say so too." You're likely to think, "Okay, maybe, but prove it to me." But today's gospel reading from Matthew - The Feeding of the 5000 - defies all attempts to make provable connections with life today. Said differently, where you go with this text largely depends on where you start with it.

Some theologians and biblical critics say this miraculous feeding event never really happened at all. They say it is a symbolic representation of the meaning of the life of Jesus as a whole. It has overtones of Communion and an end-of-time banquet. Some say the five loaves represent the five books of the Torah (Genesis to Deuteronomy). The two fish represent the old and new covenants. Along the lines with this view is an idea proposed by theologian Albert Schweitzer. He suggests this was a symbolic meal in anticipation of Holy Communion where his followers shared bits of bread as a, "veiled eschatological

sacrament." I personally disagree with this whole set of ideas, but it does exist among critical thinking academics.

Another view is the rationalistic explanation. This may be based on the ideas of early 19th century German theologian H.E.G. Paulus. This was a big idea in the 1940's-60's. This view argues that what really happened was a lesson in selflessness. The crowds were moved by the example of the disciples who were willing to give up their personal lunch and so rather than selfishly keeping their own private stashes of food they all decided to share. This view argues that the real miracle is the change in attitude, not the creation of food by Jesus.

Many many people today still hold to this view of the miracle, despite the fact that -almost as if this explanation of the miracle was anticipated- all the Bible texts that tell about this miracle, and it shows up in each gospel, make it very clear that the abundance of food originated with Jesus and Jesus alone. The people did not share.

And then there is the almost scary possibility for those who dare to be bold enough to open themselves to it, that the

historical Jesus could actually perform miracles and did feed 5000+ people with only five loaves of bread and two fish!

I say it in this way so that we can grasp the full enormity of the miracle and what it means. I think many Christian adults bring a kind of dualistic thinking to their lives. They can see everything in life critically yet let their faith remain simplistic and childlike. They can sit here on a Sunday morning getting refreshed in a fairy tale world for a while before returning to the harsh reality of the real world tomorrow morning at work. And so they may believe on some uncritical level that Jesus fed 5000 but yet be unwilling to put that belief to work in a very real way in the rest of life.

These people, as well as those who reject the authenticity of the miracle effectively put Jesus into a comfortable little box. A Sunday morning Jesus, or a Jesus who cannot perform real miracles but was only a moralistic teacher, is a man that can be contained and controlled. A real life miracle-performing Jesus cannot be contained or controlled. He is completely sovereign. He can do what he wants when he wants without regard to our little ideas of how he should act. He can be here on a Sunday

and also shake up our Monday morning reality too. That's a little bit scary. That's not a God-in-the-box who only pops up when you turn the crank by showing up here for worship.

At the center of all of this is do you believe God can and does miraculously influence the way the world works or not? Imagine the typical middle-aged middle class American. He's got a job and a family. Also a mortgage and a retirement account. Life takes work but with hard work and diligence he feels confident he can take care of things. Yes there are financial crises in the country, and yes there are health care cost concerns. But yet he has come to learn that whatever comes his way he can by his own wisdom and skills get through it. Life is comfortable and secure, and predictable. Five loaves of bread is plenty for his family to eat in a week. And two large fish are enough to grill and invite the neighbors over for supper. Life is tidy, secure, and predictable. God stays in his little box.

When five loaves are enough to feed 5000+ God is not staying conveniently in his little box. When you acknowledge God's ability to take insignificantly small resources and

multiply them into not only enough, but as symbolized by the twelve baskets of leftovers, there was a completeness of abundance, you are astounded. God who is powerful enough to feed thousands with five loaves and two fish is also powerful enough to dramatically change your life. What would you do if at your next backyard barbeque you suddenly had enough to feed 5000 people?

God may change your life in big ways. Like St. Paul who dramatically went from being a persecutor of the church to being its chief evangelist. On the road to Damascus he had a stunning vision which suddenly changed everything. Similarly dramatic was Martin Luther who was nearly struck by lightning and the experience changed his life direction from being a lawyer or to being a monk.

Or, God may change your life in small ways. Ways like the counselors at Lake Chautauqua Lutheran Center share at campfire. Every day one of the counselors has a chance to share a time when he or she saw God at work in his or her life. It's a time for personal witness and testimonial; something Lutherans are usually afraid of. Sometimes their stories are trite.

Sometimes they are deeply meaningful. Quite often they are examples of small things that have grown into big changes in their lives - things like getting a new perspective or a new career path or a greater depth of faith.

Whether big or small it is God changing lives. I invite you to open yourself to the possibilities that God may present to you. That often involves going out on a limb. It usually involves leaving the perfect little middle-class suburban perfectly controlled way of life so many seek to attain.

God who is powerful enough to feed thousands from a few loaves and fishes is powerful enough to rescue us from our sin. God is also powerful enough to bring us to eternal life. We all are in need of God's miraculous power no matter what we believe about how God uses it on earth.

Open yourself to the possibilities of what God can do through you. The source of the miracle is God, but the bread and loaves didn't fall from heaven. The resources came from people. Jesus honored them, used them, and magnified them. We also are partners with God in the miracles of our lives. May

you be willing to open all that you have to God's possibilities.
What God will do with them will astound you. Amen