

**Sermon Preached August 3, 2014
Year A, Proper 13
St. John's Episcopal Church
Beverly Farms, Massachusetts
The Rev. Stephanie Chase Bradbury**

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and sanctifier. Amen.

There's a priest who tells a story about his Saturday evenings. Since his church uses leavened bread for worship, this priest says he uses Saturdays to prepare it for their Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. He writes, "I set aside some of the crusts so that my wife can put them to good use in her delicious Caesar salads. Whenever I am asked what I do on Saturday evenings, I simply say, 'I render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's.'"¹

Stories about food and meals are common in the Bible. God often reveals his power over a meal. For instance, in first Kings [17:8-16] we get the story of Elijah and the widow. A poor widow, because of a drought, has no food but a handful of grain and a little oil. Elijah tells her to fix him supper anyway and in the process she discovers that her grain pot and oil jar never emptied. She and her family are fed for many weeks until the drought ends.

Second Kings [4:42-44] tells the story of Elisha who is given twenty small loaves of bread and a little corn. He tells his servant to give it to the people, but the servant complains that there were a hundred people and not enough food. Elisha says to do it anyway. The servant feeds the people and all had enough and there is even some left over.

¹ Rev. William G. Campbell, St. Saviour's Anglican Church, Vermilion, Alberta, found in Holy Humor by Cal and Rose Samra, 1996.

The greatest story of a meal for the Israelites involved their freedom from slavery in Egypt into the Promised Land, which happens during and after the eating of a meal.

The blood of the lamb is spread over the lintel of the door saving them from the plague of death, and the bread is baked unleavened which allows them to take it with them on the journey to freedom. This Exodus is commemorated to this day by the community sharing of the Passover meal.

The most famous meal in scripture for Christians is of course the Last Supper, a Passover meal which Jesus ate with his disciples the night before he was crucified. This meal inaugurated a new community and continues to tie us to Christ, his teachings, and his resurrected life.

There are stories of eating together after the resurrection. For instance, on the road to Emmaus where Jesus is made known to two disciples in the breaking of bread. Later Jesus appears to other disciples on the beach and eats fish with them [Luke 24:41-43]. This very concrete action proves to them that he is not a ghost, but the resurrected Christ.

Isaiah even has a vision of the future where he describes the Kingdom of God as a great banquet where all the nations and people of the earth gather in peace and reconciliation [Isa. 25:6-10]. Isaiah writes, “The Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, and... he will destroy the shroud that is cast over all peoples... he will swallow up death forever.”

And of course, all four gospels have stories of the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus is before a vast crowd and has only an impossibly small amount of food. The disciples council him to send the people away, but Jesus says to the feed them. The disciples think he's crazy but they do it anyway and again there is more than enough food. Throughout the Bible, God makes her mission known over dinner. Meals are events of revelation.

In evaluating today's reading it's helpful to look at the chapter just before this one. Jesus has been discussing the Kingdom of Heaven. If you remember from the last three weeks he has a whole list of parables and metaphors to describe the Kingdom. Now in this chapter he feeds the 5,000. This is because the story moves Christ's message from the abstract to the concrete. Jesus first describes the Kingdom; then by feeding the 5,000 he give us an example of the Kingdom. Like Isaiah, this vision of the Kingdom is found through a meal in community and there is enough for everyone.

One of the things we learn from the feeding of the 5,000 is that nothing is impossible for God. While we may all know that on one level, it sometimes is hard to believe. How many times have we heard someone say, "Oh, we can't do that at the church because we don't have enough money. We don't have enough time. We don't have enough volunteers. We don't have enough resources."

It's easy to look at what we don't have; it's divine to look at what we do. Because if something is of God, the resources will be found. Jesus wants to feed the 5,000 and what was given was found to be an abundance.

I am reminded of the wonderful ministry of the Community Shop here at St. John's. Because of the vision of a number of parishioners, what appeared to be useless cast-offs was turned into an abundance of resources to serve the Kingdom. The Shop turns used clothing and goods into between 25 -30K dollars annually to help the poor and needy in the community. It makes me wonder, with our gifts and resources, what other ministries could we realize, what other parts of the Kingdom could we nurture into fruition?

Abundance is an important Biblical concept. It doesn't mean that things fall into your lap without effort. It doesn't mean we are given resources to do things contrary to God's will. It does mean that we as individuals and as a community have been given enough from God to do God's work. Once we discern where it is the Almighty wants us to go, the resources will be there. The question becomes, will we recognize the call and have the courage to follow? Will we not let our fear of scarcity stop us?

Another point to note about the scripture passage is that while Jesus blessed and broke the bread and fish, it was the disciples who gave them to the crowd. Jesus doesn't do all the work. Part of realizing the Kingdom, making it come about, is that we must participate as well. God is in charge, but we are part of the plan.

So these two themes, abundance and participation, are found in the Kingdom of Heaven. Part of being a Christian means we don't let a fear of scarcity prevent us from doing God's work. It means we recognize the abundance we have been given. It also means we participate in the life of the church and work to do God's will. In all we do inside AND outside the church, we live as

though the Kingdom is already here. It's just not yet fully realized, but we catch glimpses of it when we do what Jesus asks of us.

And of course one of those things Jesus commands us to do is the Holy Eucharist. Like the feeding of the 5,000, food is blessed, broken, and shared. It's during communion that we have both participation of Christ's disciples, meaning us, and an acknowledgement of God's abundant grace. Through the Eucharist, a piece of the Kingdom is realized. As Jesus says in the gospel of John [6:51], "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

Like the feeding of the 5,000, this vision of the Kingdom is found through a meal in community, and there is enough for everybody. Amen.