

Theme: Going Fishing – The Fishing Stories of Jesus

“Jesus Feeds the 5,000”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber

July 7-8, 2012 at First United Methodist Church, Durango

Matthew 14:13-21

As soon as Jesus heard the news, he left in a boat to a remote area to be alone. But the crowds heard where he was headed and followed on foot from many towns. Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

That evening 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 food for themselves.” But Jesus said, “That isn’t necessary—you feed them.”

“But we have only five loaves of bread and two fish!” they answered.”

Bring them here,” he said. Then he told the people to sit down on the grass. Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward heaven, and blessed them. Then, breaking the loaves into pieces, he gave the bread to the disciples, who distributed it to the people. They all ate as much as they wanted, and afterward, the disciples picked up twelve baskets of leftovers. About 5,000 men were fed that day, in addition to all the women and children!

VIDEO Going Fishing Week 3 Sermon Starter

SLIDE Jesus Feeds the 5000

Today we continue a series of sermons for this summer on, "Going Fishing - The Fishing Stories of Jesus." As we reflect on this story today which is about fish I want to invite you to take out of your bulletin your Message Notes and Meditation Moments. At the top you will find today's Scripture passage as well as space for you to write something down from today's sermon that speaks to you. You also will find daily Scripture readings and we want to encourage you to read the Bible daily on your own and reflect upon what those passages might mean for you each day. You will find that it only takes 5 minutes to do these each day and if you don't have a Bible of your own we will give you one for free. I think you will find them to be a blessing in your life.

Don Oliver took my daughter and I out a few weeks ago to do some fishing and it's amazing when you're with a master fishermen how much you can learn

about where to fish and how to fish and what to use as you are fishing to catch the right kind of fish. That's exactly what we are going to be learning over the next few weeks together as we reflect on lessons from the Master fishermen about how to fish for people.

When I was 12 years old I took the first of several family trips to Canada in the province of Québec. My stepfather's family owned hundreds of thousands of acres of wilderness, much of which had been unexplored or uncharted. It was my first real experience of camping or fishing when we were dropped onto a lake in the middle of the wilderness from pontoon planes and then left there for three weeks, living off the land. We had canoes that had been strapped to the pontoons on the plane and we had backpacks and sleeping bags and tents, along with some food staples. Mostly I remember carrying bacon and eggs in the fancy camping cartons and then a long tube of baloney. We planned on eating fish most of our time so we didn't bring much in the way of protein. Remember that this was in the day before cell phones and so we had no communication with the outside world except for a supply plane which would meet us about halfway through our trip.

I have mostly fond memories of those trips now as we took them every year for the next few years, however at the time I am pretty sure that I whined a lot about mosquitoes and the constant rain. I had two older stepbrothers who teased me when I cried and told me to suck it up and be a man on more than one occasion and we called the experience "roughing it." After the first week of roughing it I remember being pretty homesick as I was the youngest person in our group. I was constantly complaining about living in a tent that wasn't waterproof and being soaked to the bone every day because the sun had not come out once in our first week of camping. I have a picture of me on that trip that proves how much fun I was having!

VIDEO Jeff the unhappy camper

SLIDE Gone Fishing

But the worst part of that first week was the fact that we had to eat bologna or spam almost every meal because we weren't having much luck fishing on the lake. I don't know why we were not catching fish, but I can remember having scrambled eggs and spam and bologna sandwiches and fried spam and bologna soup for what seemed like days on end. You haven't really lived until you have had to survive on bologna and spam for week!

Finally, we decided to break camp and portage to the next lake. This meant

packing everything up from our camp and carrying everything, including the canoes on our shoulders, along a creek that went from one lake to another. Sometimes we had to walk in the creek because the brush was so dense and there was no trail. I was wet and cold and constantly swatting mosquitoes away from the back of my neck. I was not happy and I'm pretty sure I whimpered and whined most of that walk.

We came to an area where the creek widened a bit and my stepfather and uncle told us we would make camp here for the night because this was a good fishing spot. I have a hard time believing anything they told me about fishing considering we had caught but one or two fish all week long and this stretch of creek seemed pretty shallow and I couldn't believe there were any fish living in it. They got out our fly rod equipment and it was the first time I ever learned how to fly fish. It was probably not the best place to learn because I constantly kept catching my fly in the bushes because there was not much room to cast along the creek.

I didn't expect to catch anything but within a few moments I had a good strike and then it seemed like every single one of us with hauling in fish after fish. They were only about 8 inches but we must have caught 30 or 40 within an hour and they were all brook trout. That night we fried them up in a pan and I learned how to bone one of those fish by simply pulling on the tail. I'm sure there were bones that we didn't get out of the fish but we ate well and slept well for the first time in a week, having enjoyed our first real taste of fish and our first bounty.

VIDEO Jeff with fish

SLIDE Gone Fishing

I have a picture of that momentous occasion when I caught that first fish and of that experience on that creek in the wilderness in Québec. It probably wasn't near as magical as I remember but as a 12-year-old who had eaten nothing but bologna for a week it seemed like heaven. The surprising abundance of fish in that creek that I experienced reminds me of the fish story that we have today where Jesus feeds 5000.

As we look more closely at this story of Jesus from Matthew's gospel I want you to try and remember a time in your life when you felt sad. Try to remember a moment where you simply felt enveloped by grief. Maybe someone close to you died or maybe there was a time that you didn't get that job you are looking forward to or maybe you lost your job and you weren't expecting to. Maybe there was a relationship which had just broken into pieces and the future you were

anticipating is no longer a possibility. In those moments you might find yourself longing for people to leave you alone. You might need time to pray or to think or to collect your thoughts. You might need to not be reminded of your grief by people asking you questions or pestering you with small details.

Imagine that you're going to get that quiet time that you desperately need and you open your front door and there is a crowd of people gathered who are clamoring for your attention. They are invading your space and they need something from you. What would you do? How would you respond?

This is the kind of space that Jesus finds himself in this story from Matthew's gospel. He has just heard about the execution of John the Baptist, his favorite cousin. John is murdered in a gruesome death and his head is presented on a platter at one of King Herod's banquet. John called Herod out, naming out loud Herod's adulterous relationship with his brother's wife. This infuriates Herod's lover and she sees John as a political threat so she conspires with her daughter to have John killed in a most demeaning and humiliating death, showing an absolute disregard for the poor and the masses who follow John.

When Jesus hears this news he needs time to be alone to deal with his grief. My guess is that he also felt some righteous anger because of the way that his cousin died. John was a prophet who gave hope and who called for conversion and repentance and he baptized Jesus. Jesus also recognizes that this moment that as he picks up the mantle of preaching about the coming kingdom of God and about God's righteousness that he and his disciples may face a similar fate to that of John.

This is the place in which Jesus finds himself as he is out on the boat, facing the crowd who had gathered on the edge of the lake, anxious about where he is going to land and what he is going to say when he comes ashore. People are wading into the shallow waters to get as close as they can and women are carrying children in their arms. The elderly are being helped by those who are younger and some are bringing those who are sick and cannot walk for themselves to be near the healer who has promised to restore the people of Israel. I imagine that some in the crowd were John's followers, feeling their own grief and wondering where they will turn to next now that their leader has been executed.

When their boat finally comes ashore Jesus doesn't have the heart to send them away, even though the disciples urge him to do this despite his own needs at that moment. Instead of being angry or frustrated as many of us often get in

our times of grief, the Scriptures tell us that Jesus had compassion on the crowd. He immediately began to care for them.

SLIDE Compassion = "insides were stirred up"

This word "compassion" in the Greek literally means that his insides were stirred up. Jesus had a gut reaction when he saw how great the needs of this crowd were.

Have you ever seen an image or heard a story that has elicited a gut reaction from you? Many of us may have had these gut responses having seen the devastation from fires in Colorado Springs & Fort Collins. Some of you have had that kind of reaction when you have seen images of devastation from a hurricane or a tornado or a tsunami. Those images caused you to take action like giving money as many of you did last week to help with emergency and recovery efforts in the communities where there have been fires. You have brought supplies for those in need and then moved to do that upon seeing images of people who have lost everything.

Compassion as Jesus lives out in the Gospels is not just about something happening on the inside of your gut but it also is about being moved to do something. That feeling of compassion that wells up inside of us moves us to offer an alternative to the destruction and that is hope. Compassion for Jesus often meant instantaneous and miraculous healings but it also meant being present for people even when he was engulfed in grief. For us, compassion can be a willingness to walk with someone through their grief and loss. Compassion can be lived out when you sponsor a child through compassion international or through our own Hope for Orphans Rescue and Education Center. Compassion can simply be bringing a meal to someone going through a tough time.

Here is one of the critical things that we learn from this story that we can't miss as we look at the gospel and the message of Jesus Christ. Jesus responds with compassion to the crowd even though he is feeling grief himself because he is modeling for us that sometimes the best response to our grief is to have compassion for someone else. We can actually work through our grief by caring for others. Part of our healing when we are in the midst of loss is recognizing that we still have something to offer and we still can have compassion and have our guts stirred up.

This struck me as I was reading about residents who were allowed to return after the Waldo Canyon Fire in Colorado Springs to sift through the rubble of their homes. The picture on the front page of the Denver Post was 80 year old Laretta

Anzalone in a wheelchair who had lost her home of 19 years.

SLIDE Laretta Anzalone

Neighbors who lived around her and who had lost their own homes went through the rubble of her house, even though they had lost everything as well. When they asked the young man why he was doing that, he said that there was something healing and therapeutic about helping someone else even in the midst of his loss.

I remember experiencing this firsthand when I was in college and I went on a spring break mission trip to Mexico City after the devastation of the earthquake they killed more than 1 million people and destroyed millions of homes. I found myself serving alongside several people who had lost their homes and still had not found all of their family members. When I asked them how they could be working and sifting through the rubble like the rest of us one of them said to me through a translator, "We are followers of Jesus. What else would we be doing?"

Part of what it means to be Jesus Christ to the world is to recognize that sometimes the healing in the midst of our grief comes from rolling up our sleeves and getting our hands dirty. Sometimes compassion looks like listening or sharing a hard truth. The compassion of Jesus reached out to that crowd some 2000 years ago and it reaches out to us today.

There is another piece to this story I don't want us to miss and that is the response of the disciples. Perhaps they were motivated by acts of compassion or perhaps they were just being pragmatic, but they come to Jesus when it is getting close to dark to tell him he should dismiss the crowd so they could all go get something to eat. I sometimes wonder when I read stories like this the disciples themselves were hungry and they just blamed the crowd! You know how we do this sometimes, right? We act as if we are doing something for someone else when really we are trying to meet our own needs and I wonder if this is not what the disciples are doing in this story.

Maybe it was even simpler than that for the disciples. Maybe they simply wanted time with Jesus for themselves to grieve the loss of John whom no doubt many of them counted as a friend. Maybe they wanted a safe place to voice their anger over John's death and to discuss the uncertainty of what that meant for them.

The reaction of Jesus is powerful in this scene as he turns to his disciples and simply says, "Give them something to eat yourselves." The disciples once again give a very pragmatic answer. "We have only five loaves and two fish,"

which is basically just enough for them. Jesus asks them to bring the bread and the fish to him, essentially saying to them that life is not all about them, neither their current hunger or their desire to keep Jesus to themselves. Jesus shows us that his compassion is for those who are in need, the poor and hurting. As Jesus blesses the food he gives the disciples a preview of what it means to bless and to give a meal sacrificially.

Have you ever seen a need that is overwhelming and thought to yourself, "I want to do something but I don't have enough to make a difference"? I imagine that is how the disciples felt as they look at this enormous crowd when Jesus told them to find food for not just themselves but for the entire crowd. I'm guessing the disciples panicked as they looked over this large crowd and realized there wasn't a McDonald's or a City Market anywhere in sight and no one had enough credit on their credit card to pay for the bill anyway.

In the midst of their anxiety Jesus took charge by having the people sit down into groups. He then took the bread and blessed it and gave it back to the disciples to distribute. Here is another important point in this story. The disciples don't have enough on their own and with their own power to take care of the needs of the people. The disciples must first receive from Jesus the blessings that he offers and then there is enough for everyone.

SLIDE Jesus blesses the food and there is enough.

The source of the feeding is God but the resources are human and they are distributed by the disciples who are human. The Scripture tells us that everyone ate and was satisfied and the disciples picked up 12 baskets of broken pieces that were left over.

The disciples have two jobs. They distribute this and they collect the resources that were left over. That is how all of our ministry is meant to work. The Lord gives it to some so they might give it to others when in need. The apostle Paul put it this way in several of his letters to the early church.

SLIDE *"That which I have received I deliver to you."*

The work of the disciples, the bread of human work, is honored, used and magnified by Jesus. This is how our Christian faith is meant to work. Some Bible scholars have suggested that the miracle in this story is not really about Jesus magically producing enough bread and fish for the people to eat. Jesus is not some genie in a bottle and we rubbed the lamp and make a wish and all of a sudden we get what we ask for.

The Scripture doesn't tell us exactly how this happened and I myself have imagined that bread just keeps appearing in the baskets or as the disciples break the bread more bread seems to appear in their hands. I don't really have a problem with that and I think that Jesus could have done that if he wanted, but it also could have been something else. Could it possibly be that as the crowds saw the disciples sharing what they had that they were then motivated to bring forth their own food and share it with others who had none?

We learn in this story that there were women and children in the crowd and the practical side of me recognizes that most moms and even most dads today bring truckloads of food in their backpacks and bags and strollers so that when the kids start fussing you can stuff food in their mouths. They didn't have a Ziploc bags or Lunchables or Capri Sun drinks but parents in the first century were just as prepared to feed their children on a long hot day as we are today. They probably had bread, salted fish, dried fruit and anything else they could carry in their robes or sacks.

Matthew's gospel tells us that there were 5000, not counting women and children in the crowd. This crowd probably numbered something more like 20 to 35,000 if you counted everyone and I can imagine the people in the crowds, as they are forced to sit down in circles and look in the eyes of people sitting in their circle, that they would share the food they had brought with them and place it in the baskets that each family no doubt brought so it could be shared. They inspired each other to share what little they had, creating more than enough to feed the crowd.

So which is the greater miracle? Is it a greater miracle that Jesus would miraculously create enough food for everyone to eat? Or is it a greater miracle that people would learn to risk and trust and hope and share with one another, especially people they may not know. **One is the transformation of bread and stuff and the other is a transformation of the heart**, which is really what Jesus was after, wasn't it?

I find both possibilities miraculous.

This story is also meant to remind us of another story where God miraculously provided food for his people. In Exodus we read about the Israelites who have been liberated by Moses from slavery in Egypt and they now are in the wilderness together. Manna from heaven comes and provides food for them for each day. But you might remember in that story that they cannot save any of the bread for the next day and if they do it becomes rotten and they can't eat it. The

point of that story is to trust God every day and that he will provide.

In this story in the gospel there is this one small and yet powerful difference. At the end of the meal which has been provided the disciples are able to collect 12 baskets of left overs for later. This image I think tells us several things about God in Jesus Christ. First, we see the abundance of Christ which will overflow our baskets as we invite him to bless all that we are and all that we have.

Second, these 12 baskets are enough for each disciple to have one, letting them know that they didn't need to worry about having enough when they shared what they had. The disciples have enough for now and for their continued journey as they follow Jesus. These leftover baskets serve as a reminder to the disciples to put their trust and obedience in Jesus Christ.

Third, the number 12 is symbolic of the 12 tribes of Israel and Jesus' ability to provide food and blessings for all of his people. This meal and the fact that there are leftovers are meant to give us a clue that Jesus desires to provide food and blessings for the entire world and indeed all of creation, not just those gathered at the lake that day.

This story and others like it in the Gospels are meant to reflect to us the abundance of Christ. The feeding of the multitude is an example of the new creation and God's kingdom that is being ushered in through Jesus Christ. This story offers us a new way to live with one another and invites us to practice this way because it is how it will be in the great banquet as we gather with Christ for a meal.

SLIDE Not Counting Women and Children

Megan McKenna, in her book *Not Counting Women and Children: Neglected Stories from the Gospel* says this.

SLIDE *"These stories of multiplication offer us a pattern for our worship and ministry. This is the way God works. God takes our often reluctant gifts, all that God's friends and disciples have, and he blesses it and gives it away to those who are in need."*

The disciples serve as a model of risk taking and trusting in the new Kingdom that Jesus announces. It is a new way to be together that Jesus offers the disciples and us.

In this story we find direction for our own lives as followers of Jesus. We are to learn to have compassion for one another, even in the face of violence and

political events and even when we are grieving. We are to spend our days getting to know those who are hungry, both spiritually and physically, and then care for their needs by sharing out of the abundance with which we have been blessed.

We pool together our resources, even when there doesn't appear to be enough. Even when it seems impossible to make a difference and even when it is all that we have and we need for ourselves, this story calls us to share anyway because it is the only way to live.

Jesus is not concerned with what is ours, either collectively or individually. The reality is that all that we have belongs to God anyway and he wants to use it for the needs and the hungers of the world. God's desire is to use everything we have, all of life's sustenance, to bring about more life that is overflowing for the world.

I see this kind of sharing and caring in our church time and time again. I see it through our support ministries and through Celebrate Recovery on Monday night which enables people to work through their hurts, habits and hang-ups. I see it through our Congregational Care Ministry and volunteers who bring meals and write notes of encouragement and visit you in the hospital and journey with you as you are going through a divorce or a diagnosis of cancer. Many of you who volunteer and journey through times of grief with others have been through your own grief and this story reminds me of you and how you serve. I have heard and seen for myself the healing that takes place on both sides when there is compassionate sharing.

There is one final element to this story I want us to note as we think about the loaves and the fish and the feeding of 5000. When the disciples bring forward the loaves of bread and the pieces of fish, Jesus blesses and then breaks and gives the bread.

This is the same pattern that we find in Holy Communion. This is the same pattern and the same instruction that Jesus gave when met with his disciples in the upper room the night before his death. This is a pattern they continued after his death and resurrection. It is a pattern which continues in age after age and generation after generation. The disciples and leaders in the church are meant to take the bread and bless it and give it in the name of Jesus Christ.

Walter Brueggemann, a noted American theologian, says that "these four words are the decisive verbs of our sacramental existence."

SLIDE "took, blessed, broke and gave"

Jesus is conducting a meal of Thanksgiving which is what the word *Eucharist* means. It is why we use this word when we talk about Holy Communion. Through his actions, Jesus is demonstrating that the world is filled with abundance and primed for generosity. When bread is broken and blessed and shared, there is enough for everyone. In this story and in all the other accounts of miraculous feeding of multitudes, you don't see people grasping or hoarding or resentful or acting selfishly. They watch as Brueggeman says,

SLIDE "...the juices of heaven multiply the bread of the Earth."

This story is told in all of the Gospels and it was repeated over and over again in the early church. Why? Because this story captures the fundamental nature of Jesus and his response to our human struggle with selfishness and thinking it's all about us. This story demonstrates the depth of Jesus' compassion and his care for us, even in our brokenness and desire to keep to ourselves.

This story captures the essence of God's abundant grace and generous gifts to us with more than 12 baskets left over. Jesus took those meager five loaves and two fish presented by the disciples and worked a miracle with them. He didn't just mend broken bones or paralyzed bodies, but he brought to life frozen hearts as he transformed them through his blessing.

Jesus longs to do the same for us as well. God wants us to bring our gift to him—our five loaves and two fish—our ordinary talents and gifts and abilities and resources. When we do that God will transform them for the world.

God has a heart for those in need and he expects us, as his disciples, to provide what we have to help care for others. We are meant to demonstrate that we don't have to live by the world's standards. There is so much that we can do if we only trust God and offer our resources to him to bless and transform into something great. We are called to model in our families, and in our communities and in the church an alternative to our existing reality.

God wants us to open our hands and our hearts and to trust him with what he has given us. Don't worry if what you have to offer doesn't seem sufficient, because it is. God will take whatever you offer and spread it to help bring about the glory of God's kingdom. You just have to let God take care of the miracle.

If you have a desire to give more, but you feel in your heart that what you have to offer is not worthy or it isn't enough, I want to invite you to bring that to God today and to this Communion table. God is longing to bless what you have if you only will bring it to him.

SLIDE COMMUNION

SLIDE PRAYER

We open our hands to you God, and what we see in them seems so pitifully small sometimes. The product of all of our life labors doesn't seem very much in the face of all the need that we see in the world. It seems as paltry as five loaves and two fish did to your disciples. Yet, we know that you are the God of abundance, so take what we have to offer and use us. Use us with all of our talents and abilities. Make our offering acceptable in your site and sufficient for the needed hand.

Help us to step outside of our fear of enough and place our trust and obedience in your provision. Let us be signs of your kingdom on this Earth. May we become the bread of life and hope for others, the leftover fragments meant to be taken out into the world and given away with stories of a miracle happening here and now. This is our prayer today God, offered in the name of Jesus who offers us grace upon grace. Amen.

Sermon Series: Going Fishing – The Fishing Stories of Jesus

Sermon Title: “Jesus Feeds the 5,000”

Matthew 14:13-21

As soon as Jesus heard the news, he left in a boat to a remote area to be alone. But the crowds heard where he was headed and followed on foot from many towns. Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. That evening 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 food for themselves.” But Jesus said, “That isn’t necessary—you feed them.” “But we have only five loaves of bread and two fish!” they answered. “Bring them here,” he said. Then he told the people to sit down on the grass. Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward heaven, and blessed them. Then, breaking the loaves into pieces, he gave the bread to the disciples, who distributed it to the people. They all ate as much as they wanted, and afterward, the disciples picked up twelve baskets of leftovers. About 5,000 men were fed that day, in addition to all the women and children!

Things I'd like to remember from today's sermon:

Meditation Moments

Monday, July 9 – Read Exodus 16:1-18, 31-35. Biblical faith in God as creator said that Earth's abundance came from God's awareness that humans need food (see Genesis 2:7-9). When Israel left Egypt to cross the forbidding Sinai Peninsula, God answered their fear of starvation by providing food in a dramatic, long-lasting way. God's wonderful provision became a permanent part of their story.

- Our phrase "manna from heaven" refers to the way Israelite history said this food just "appeared" in the desert after God promised it. The name was a Hebrew pun. "Manna" echoed the phrase "man hu," which meant "What is it?" (or even "What is this stuff?"). When has God provided for you in a way that surprised, or even puzzled, you?
- Surely no one could forget food appearing every day. But God told Moses to keep some manna as a reminder "for future generations" (verse 32). In Numbers 14 the Israelites, after having their morning manna, wanted to kill Moses, give up on God and go back to Egypt. What helps you remember that God cares for you, even when things get tough?

Tuesday, July 10 – Read Matthew 14:13-21. Jesus had just received news that Herod had killed John the Baptist (Matthew 14:10). He trusted in God's eternity, but he must have grieved John's death at the corrupt tyrant's hands. He withdrew, needing spiritual sustenance much as the crowd who found him in that

remote place needed both his spiritual teaching and, after a long day, physical food.

- *Matthew used the expressive word translated “compassion” to describe Jesus’ reaction to the crowd. The word literally meant “his insides were stirred up” (Translator’s Handbook on Matthew). As you learn to see the world more as God sees it, what things stir up your insides, your compassion, in intense ways?*
- *Almost all of us say, at times, “Somebody should do something about . . .” While it’s true that no one of us can solve all the world’s problems alone, Jesus’ word to the disciples — “You give them something to eat” — surely speaks to us as well. How can you discern when you are the “somebody” God is calling to do something?*

Wednesday, July 11 – Read Matthew 15:32-39. *In this story, the length of time away from town, the tone of Jesus’ talk with the disciples, and the location all differ from the story in Matthew 14 (as they do in Mark’s parallel stories—Mark 6:30-44; 7:31-8:10). This event took place in the Decapolis, so most of the 4,000 would have been Gentiles. Jesus fed them as caringly as he did the Jewish crowd in chapter 14.*

- *Acts 11:1-3 and 15:1-6 show that some early Christians, trained in the Jewish faith, found it hard to accept Gentiles as full citizens in God’s Kingdom. How would these stories of Jesus miraculously feeding two crowds, one Jewish and one Gentile, show God’s view of that issue? Who are the people you aren’t sure “fit” in God’s family today?*
- *Two spawning rainbow trout can produce thousands of eggs and many offspring over the course of their lives. God built miracles of multiplication like that into creation. Jesus multiplied “seven loaves and a few fish” to feed 4,000 people—the same power at work in an unusual way. How has God used usual or unusual miracles to bless you?*

Thursday, July 12 – Read Mark 6:45-52. *Today’s story came right after Jesus fed 5,000 people (Mark 6:33-44). The disciples’ little boat was in trouble on the lake. Jesus walked out to them. But “they thought he was a ghost and they screamed ...he spoke to them, ‘... Don’t be afraid.’ He got into the boat, and the wind settled down. His disciples were so baffled they were beside themselves.*

That's because they hadn't understood about the loaves." (Mark 6:49-52, Common English Bible)

- What had the disciples not understood? They didn't yet see that, in Jesus, God's kingdom was here. In the 4th century Augustine wrote, "He came treading the waves; and so he puts all the swelling tumults of life under his feet. Christians—why be afraid?" What helps you to trust Jesus to feed you spiritually, to be with you during life's worst storms?
- Is the idea of God actually "showing up" a bit scary? In C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Mr. Beaver said of Aslan the Lion (Christ), "He's not tame—but he's good." In what ways is Jesus "not tame"? What gives you confidence that he's good?

Friday, July 13 – Read John 6:24-51. In today's passage, the crowd sought out Jesus the day after they saw him feed 5,000 people with what began as five loaves of bread and two fish. They remembered the manna (verses 30-33). They thought it would be wonderful to have a king who could create food on demand. Jesus challenged them to see how he could feed them in more significant ways.

- In verse 46, Jesus told his listeners, "No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God," a clear reference to himself. As Jesus' followers, we have been charged with letting people see him in us. That means letting people see the God of the universe. In what ways does your day-to-day way of life let others see God's love in you?
- As kids, many of us got excited about Communion because it's a chance to eat in church. Even as adults, we can focus on the symbol—we want the bread to taste good. When Jesus turned the image by saying "I am the bread of life," what do you believe he was teaching us? What steps can you take to spiritually eat the bread of life regularly?

Saturday, July 14 – Read Matthew 26:26-30. As when he fed the large crowds, "Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat.'" But he added, "This is my body." In Matthew 4, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 to the tempter, saying "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." As citizens of two worlds, we need sustenance in both. We need spiritual food even more than we need physical food—and Jesus used physical bread as a symbol to tell us he can meet our deepest inner need.

- *It might be more exact, with Christians' faithfully keeping the Eucharist for 2,000 years, to call this "the first" and not "the last" supper. Jesus said, "I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (verse 29). Think about Jesus serving you Communion in heaven. How will he look at you? What might he tell you? What will you want to say to him?*

Family Activity: *Read John 6:35. Discuss what Jesus meant when he called himself the "Bread of Life." How can your family share both physical and spiritual "bread" with others? Consider collecting canned or boxed food for a food pantry. Maybe you could make a meal for a soup kitchen or for homeless people. You might invite a family to your home for dinner. Think ahead of time about how to share Jesus' love and grace along with the food. You could pray with someone or tell them, "Jesus loves you." You could create a card that includes a drawn or written blessing. As God provides for our physical bread, God has also given us Jesus, the Bread of Life. Ask God to help your family share that bread with others.*