

Text: John 6:1-21

In my first career I was a preschool teacher at a church day-school. And as a church school, Christian education was a part of the curriculum, so the story of the loaves and fishes was in there. I would use my favorite *Read-Aloud Bible Stories** and pick out the one called “The Boy Who Shared His Lunch.”

There are a few stories about Jesus that feature children, and this is one of them – so great to use with pre-schoolers! Because it was a little boy like them who provided the fish and bread for the miracle Jesus would perform. Jesus did not hesitate to use the resources of one of the least of that crowd of 5000 people.

I wonder how Andrew came upon that little boy, how he reacted to being brought forward to sacrifice what was probably his own lunch or maybe that of him and his family. Was it a little like taking his lunch money? Did his parents object? Were they hesitant?

But usually, young children don’t really worry about that. What they have has been given to them, and they quite willingly will give it away. Every day at the preschool snack table the raisins and apple slices and carrot sticks got moved around – don’t like what your mom or dad sent? Here, have some of my goldfish or gummy snacks or M&M’s – it’s a whole bag full, after all! Plenty for you and me – at least that’s how it was thirty years ago at the preschool snack table.

(Today, it might be a while before sharing among the children of different households is allowed, let alone encouraged, I imagine.)

John the gospel-writer doesn’t tell us much about the young boy or his reaction. Perhaps Andrew knew him or his family, for him to have pulled him out of the crowd with his stash of bread and fish.

Obviously, the boy’s lunch wouldn’t be enough for everyone – the five *thousand* gathered was about the same as the population of most villages of the time, or more. His meagre offering, with five barley loaves -- the food of the poor -- and just two fishes, probably not big ones -- might have been a *start* for a collection of food that

maybe Andrew though might solve the lunch problem. If everybody just shared what they had... I know some people discount this miracle story on the basis of such an idea. Even Andrew probably didn't really think the little sack of bread and fish would be the base material for a miracle.

But for Jesus, that's all it took.

This story about the feeding of the five thousand echoes another story that Jesus' disciples and listeners knew well – that of Moses. There in Exodus is another miracle of bread, only in *that* story it's more bread-like, in the form of manna, and *like* in *this* story, there was enough to satisfy everyone. The people saw the connection – that's why they come to their realization that this Jesus must be a prophet – THE prophet destined to be their KING.

But Jesus wasn't that kind of earthly king, and so he retreated from them.

One of the commentators I read for this text was reminded of a saying: "If you think God is far away from you, who moved?" That might be a worthy saying worth considering, but, in this case, it is in fact Jesus who moved, who retreated up the mountain from the crowds.

Not so much because he didn't love them, but because they didn't understand who he was. He wasn't going to be their earthly warrior-prophet king who would lead them in battle against the Romans.

And so he slipped out of their grasp.

Sometimes we too misunderstand who Jesus is and what God's purposes are. We think if God answered this prayer to our satisfaction, then certainly God will answer *that* prayer to our satisfaction too. And if not, then God must not love us; God has left us; and well, *maybe* God doesn't even *exist*.

People can lose sight of Jesus as he retreats back up the mountain because he's not who they think he is.

Rev. Barbara Krumm
Sermon – Pentecost 9 B – July 25, 2021

There are plenty of people in the world who have sketchy ideas about who God is. Sometimes it's because they just never heard about God, or about Jesus Christ. Sometimes it's because they misunderstood what was told to them about God; sometimes it's because they were taught by someone who misunderstood. Some have turned their backs on God because someone, or a group of someones, claiming to know God, turned their backs on *them*. And they don't want to know *that* God.

But we believe OUR God doesn't turn away – from anyone. Our God is a God of grace, and forgiveness. Every. Time.

And we, like the disciples, and those who stayed to follow Jesus, have a story to tell. A story of creation, sin and suffering, redemption and eternal life. A story of love – it's not just the greatest story ever told, it's the greatest *love* story ever told, and it's a story about you and me, and God, and the whole world.

So even though we don't know everything about God, we can tell that story. If we can't help people fully know God, at least we can help them know who and WHAT is NOT God. We can help a little. And if we can't reach ALL the people who don't know the God we love, at least we can reach SOME of them – at least a few.

And remember that Jesus works miracles -- from the smallest of means.

Amen.

**Read-Aloud Bible Stories*, published in 1985 by Moody Press, is a series of 3 volumes of Bible stories written for children by Ella K. Lindvall and illustrated by Ken Renczenski. "The Boy Who Shared His Lunch" is in Vol. 2.