

John Sampson
"Something to Eat"
Text: Matthew 14:13 - 21
Preached at KVCC
August 6, 2017

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer. AMEN.

"You give them something to eat."

That's the sentence that stops me dead in our reading today.

That's the sentence that I keep coming back to over, and over again when I think about the story of the feeding of the 5,000.

Jesus and his disciples look out in front of where they are standing, and they can't miss the reality staring back at them. So many hungry people. So many men, women and children who have followed Jesus

all day, and from town to town. They've come to Jesus to be cured, to hear his teaching, to simply be seen, and be a part of a community that promises hope, and a vision of a world where they matter.

Their bodies hunger; their stomachs growl. But so do their hearts and their spirits. They hunger within their souls for the respect and dignity denied to them living as peasants under Roman rule.

And with only a couple of fish and loaves of bread in baskets lying at their feet Jesus turns to his disciples and he says to them:

"You give them something to eat."

And his disciples respond. I'll translate their words for you into modern American. Wait a minute Jesus didn't you get this wrong? Aren't ***you*** the beloved son of God, the healer and miracle worker? Isn't that your job? We're just regular people. We just play the supporting role when it comes to the supernatural magic tricks.

We'll just step back here, check our messages, see what's going on on Facebook, and see how our stocks did today. And once you've multiplied the fish and the loaves, Jesus, we'll be back.

And that's what happens. The authors of Matthew tell us that Jesus does perform a miracle and somehow, against the laws of nature, 5,000 people are fed with food that should have only been enough to feed a couple of friends. Jesus stepped up and did what his disciples expected, and he did what we expected.

But that haunting refrain returns. It bubbles up from somewhere inside of me, and outside of me, and it won't be silenced.

"You give them something to eat."

As disciples of Jesus we look out in front of where we are standing, and we can't miss the reality staring back at us. So many hungry

people. Standing before us in this town there are families I've met at the Keene Food Pantry that don't have enough food to last through the month. Standing before us at schools throughout the Adirondacks are children who only get enough food because of the state funded meal programs their cafeterias provide. Our neighbors' bodies hunger; Our stomachs growl. But so do our hearts and our spirits. Standing before us, and sitting next to us, are all who weep and desperately desire to hear words of hope, communion and community.

And with only the people and skills and resources gathered together in this room this morning Jesus turns and looking straight into our eyes he says:

“You give them something to eat.”

I think the reason I keep coming back to this statement by Jesus is because it is so unexpected. It makes me think that Jesus believes *I* might actually have the power to feed those who are standing right in front of me with their stomachs aching, even though I'm no miracle worker. It makes me think that *we*, as followers of Jesus and his message of hope, might actually be capable of feeding the spirits and the hearts of all those living in a world that often denies us our basic humanity.

Could we really be the people that Jesus hints to us we might be? Could we be the ones that will feed the hungry, and comfort the hopeless in this town, within the Adirondacks, and beyond? And could we do all of this with only the limited resources we have in this room?

But I'm skirting the real question, because its audacity seems almost a scandal to say out loud.

Do miracles happen?

Are miracles true?

To respond to these questions I won't consult the stories of Jesus, and I won't look to the Bible and our Christian heritage. I'll go to the pages of our lives, to the stories of our lived experience. For some of us, we have experienced a miracle at one time or another. We can share stories of someone who was told that they only had a couple of months to live, and yet all these years later are completely healthy. Or perhaps we know of someone who didn't have a lot, but suddenly was gifted with a car out of the blue. These are stories that you have told me. But there are others in the pews who find the very idea of the miraculous as logically indefensible, that the laws of physics and nature cannot allow for. For some of you, miracles are only wishful thinking.

This is the wonder of serving a congregation like this one. Varied perspectives of any article of the Christian faith sit side by side within these walls.

As your pastor I am not here to deny anyone's deep and profound experience of the unexpected. I'm also not here to refute or mandate anyone's belief. I am here to support all of you in your spiritual journeys, and the lives of faith that God is calling you to live into. And so, in that spirit, I'll simply share with you how I think about miracles in the hopes that it might help you think about them in a helpful way, and see them as an encouragement within your lives.

For me, miracles are like a target; they give us something to shoot for, and encourage us to work for transformation within ourselves, and within our communities, that may seem impossible. They help

us believe that the limitations and boundaries of our lives are not so rigid that they could never be surpassed. In a word, they give us hope. Hope that things can improve and change, even though we can't imagine how at the present time. And they give us a vision of what could be, and ask us to risk ourselves, even if we will never experience the transformation we have desired.

Maybe the feeding of the 5,000 never really happened in an empirical and objective way, in the way the authors of Matthew tell the tale. Maybe it did. But I think the importance of this story is that it encourages us to respond to the challenges of our world, even if we believe we don't have much to offer, and might despair that our contribution couldn't possibly make a difference.

When Jesus tells his disciples, when he tell us, to "give them something to eat" he knows that we probably won't be able to end hunger in this town, and in the North Country for good. But he

invites us to dream and act as if we could in the hopes that we will risk it. That we will risk ourselves and our resources to help those whose stomachs and spirits groan in want.

“You give them something to eat.”

Wherever we can. However we can. In whatever way we can.

Whether those we meet suffer from a hunger of the body, or a hunger of the spirit. Whether the hungry is the Other, or is our own self, Jesus is looking us straight in the eye this morning and telling us:

“You give them something to eat.”

AMEN.