

Help us to See the Signs
Help us to Understand the Signs
Allow the Signs to Guide our Faith
Amen

Our first reading tells us of twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain from the servant's sack feeding over a hundred people. And God saying, "They shall eat and have some left" In today's Gospel we hear of the feeding of the multitudes by 5 loaves and two fish from the boy. If you believe that these stories are merely the retelling of MIRACLES, then we actually need to look no further and can accept them as such. We could consider these miracles among many

1. The Wine at Cana
2. The Healing of an official's son
3. The Healing of a sick man
4. The Healing of the man born blind
5. The resurrection of Lazarus
6. Walking on Water

And just say "Praise Be God" and move on with our Service.

In my examination and reflexion of today's Readings, I decided to look at the SIGNS. The story of feeding the multitudes is very close to my heart. In this story, 5,000 men plus an uncounted number of women and children have gathered to witness Jesus. We hear that the boy offers his five barley loaves and two fish - NOT that there are only 5 loaves and 2 fish. There is no indication that no one else gathered has food. In the Old Testament reading the servant's 20 loaves and fresh ears of grain in his sack fed over 100 people.

So let's look at MIRACLE versus SIGN: Did Jesus just take the loaves and fish provided by the boy and literally multiply them for the crowd or did God multiply the servant's food to feed the 100.

OR

Did others, noticing the boy offering his loaves and fish or the servant sharing his sack of food, begin to pull out their own food to share with those gathered.

As the Executive Director of St. Margaret's Food Pantry at Grace Church every day I see the number of people that gather that need food and I am thankful for those that share their food with the Food Pantry so that we can feed over 300 every month. I see today's stories as signs of the goodness of people. Everyone sees the boy offer to share the minimal amount of food he has to feed the multitude and I think this and the love of Jesus inspire everyone to reach from within and share what food they may have with them. It is the coming together of many for the welfare of all. So much so that at the end of the day, Jesus tells his disciples to "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." When they did this, they filled up twelve baskets. Similarly, the servant's food is shared and the Lord says "They shall eat and have some left over."

Can it be that the kindness of one person helps to encourage others to give. I have to believe that, because every day I see how many the Food Pantry is able to serve. I also see how putting a call out for help always gets a response. We must look everyday at what we have and how we can share that with others.

When sharing my sermon with my husband, he reminded me of the fable of The Stone Soup. This stone soup story is about a hungry traveler who comes to a new town and would like something to eat. He puts a stone in a large pot of boiling water and other people are curious what he is doing. He explains that he is making "stone soup", but it would be even better if they added more food to the soup. The towns people each contributed a simple ingredient and a delicious soup was made. The people feared that it wasn't the stone that made the soup so good, but it was everyone coming together and sharing what they had to make it so good. And the traveler shared his soup with everyone.

SO is the actual message of this story and our readings that a philosophy of ABUNDANCE will prove successful rather than an acceptance of SCARCITY.

I am currently participating in the resurrection of The Poor People's Campaign that was created by Martin Luther King over 50 years ago to make sure that the voices of all were heard and that the marginalized were cared for. 50 years later we are dealing with very similar issues. Are you aware that there are over 1500 non-profit organizations in Utica serving the needs of those that need help in various ways. 1500 - that number was astounding to me. We are trying to examine how some of the 1500 organizations can work together to support the needs of the marginalized rather than each organization working in silos, serving fewer people and dividing the limited funds and resources that are available. As a whole, we are working together to ensure that there is enough for all, just as the multitudes that had gathered were fed.

I was also impressed with the outreach and relationship St. James has with St. Paul's Parish Beaudin Jean Pierre, Haiti and the support of the school lunch program and purchase of buildings to be used as a school. One of my first times attending St. James, the Mission in Haiti was discussed, primarily the pilgrimage that was coming up to help that parish. I heard more about that pilgrimage at General Convention that Fall after the trip had taken place and enjoyed the photos that were posted from the trip. I was impressed how a small congregation came together to adopt and support a congregation that needed help in so many ways. Similar to the SIGN that when people come together for a common purpose, they can provide for a great number in many ways. What a true example of Jesus's love. This is truly God's Love at work.

I see in all of these examples that when Jesus calls us together and we live in God's love we can make great things happen that we COULD NOT do alone. Working together for the common good of every man is a wonderful lesson for each of us to learn. Every person is blessed and has an abundance of something. You may have a personal talent that you can share, knitting and making a prayer shawl for someone who is struggling, gardening and helping inner city communities develop land for a community garden. You may have an abundance of clothing that is just piling up in your closet that can be used at the local homeless shelter or woman's shelter. When you are grocery shopping, you can think about buying a few extra items for the local Food Pantry or sharing the harvest from your own garden.

Those of us who might be tempted to believe that we have too little to offer need to remember how Jesus multiplies the contributions of the faithful by providing the inspiration. God provides plenty for our needs.

Our faith in Jesus means that we must find it in ourselves the ability to feed the hungry, care for the downtrodden, give a voice to the marginalized and support the afflicted. Of course this does not mean we can individually provide for so many in this world who lack certain basic needs. Our resources individually might not be sufficient for the task, but we each must receive from Jesus what he gives to us and go into the world to spread his gifts together.

Today's Gospel begs us to understand how the people need the Lord. It happened for them and it will happen for us if we have faith. How often is it that all someone needs is a simple reassurance or a helping hand.

All of life and the gifts of abundance come from God, Jesus came to provide the inspiration to open our hearts and our hands to those in need. Let us all go out into the world and provide help and support to those we can. Everyone has a gift to give.

AMEN