

Pentecost 7/July 31, 2011

As miracles go, the one in our Gospel lesson today is out of the ordinary from what we've come to expect. Throughout the pages of the New Testament we encounter the miraculous. It is part of the warp and woof of the gospel. Some have tried to reduce or eliminate the miraculous. Thomas Jefferson literally took a razor and cut out all references to miracles. What he had left was 46 pages of Jesus' teachings. But for most of us, miracles are standard Biblical fare. Often times, in miracle stories, the stakes are pretty high. A child is sick...a man is lame...a woman is hemorrhaging blood. But in this story, the stakes do not appear to be all that great. The crowd in the story is hungry, but they are certainly not starving. They are hungry the way you might be hungry because supper is being served late or because you were too busy to stop for lunch. The disciples knew the people were a bit hungry and their solution was for Jesus to send the crowd away, ostensibly so "they can go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Maybe the disciples were concerned about the people's welfare, but when I "listen between the lines" here, I wonder if maybe they weren't more interested in calling it quits for the day and the suggestion that the crowd leave to buy food was just a convenient way of getting rid of them. It had been an emotional day. John the Baptist had been murdered by Herod. Jesus had sought

to get away to a quiet place, but the crowds had followed Him. Not one to turn anyone away, it says of Jesus, "...and he had compassion for them and cured their sick." This crowd wasn't going anywhere anytime soon and the disciples knew it. But they were tired. They'd had enough, and so they make the suggestion that Jesus send them away. They can even give a good reason for sending them away...they need to eat. That is when Jesus says, "they need not go away, you give them something to eat." We've all had times when we've had enough, even of a good thing. We get emotional...we get tired...we look for a way out. "Send them away...the hour is late...they need to eat..." It made sense. But it was not what Jesus had in mind. "...they need not go away; you give them something to eat." They complained that all they had was a handful of bread loaves and a couple of small fish. They didn't know that their excuse would become God's opportunity. So, Jesus took the fish and the loaves, blessed them, broke them and gave them to the crowd. And in His hands the miracle occurred. Five loaves and two fish became more than enough. All were fed and there were basketsful of leftovers to boot. So what's the lesson here for us? That Jesus can work miracles? Well, most of us already believe that. And besides, this miracle is pretty modest next to say, a resurrection. The lesson must be something more. Could the lesson be that when we give God whatever it is that we have in our

hand, it gets used and multiplied in ways we could never have dreamed possible? Could the lesson be that a little is a lot when God is in it? Does that resonate with you like it does with me? I mean, here we are a little band of believers seeking to represent the Episcopal Church in Maumelle. Maumelle and the outlying vicinity probably total in excess of 20,000 souls and we total..what...about 25...on a good Sunday? We don't have a building of our own...we have a deacon instead of a priest...we meet at night...and most people who live in our community, even those who might want to identify with us, don't even know we are here.

Sometimes that feels a lot like five loaves and two fish to me. But when God is in the picture, it is never just a matter of what you have. Because what you have changes when God touches it. Five loaves and two fish would have remained a mediocre lunch for one if Jesus had not taken it, blessed it, broke it and gave it. I believe Jesus has the same compassion for the people of Maumelle that He had for the people in this story. I believe the thing that changes everything is when we take what we have and we put it in His hands. That is where the miracle happens.

At St. Nicholas we are a small church but we have big dreams. We desire to be a vital congregation in Maumelle. We've adopted the Dick Johnson Camp as our mission project. We're looking at ways we can serve our community. Sometimes,

it is only human to look at what we don't have. We don't have our own building. We don't have a full-time, or even half-time priest...yet. We don't have a lot of money. But, like these early disciples we are not empty handed. They had 5 loaves and two fish. In the eyes of some it wasn't much, but in the hands of Jesus it was enough...actually it was more than enough. We, too, have our loaves and fish. We have dedicated members who care very much for one another. What a beautiful time we had a few weeks back when so many of us gathered at Ms. Betty's art show! We have talented hands that have created beautiful altar coverings. We have folks who have designed t-shirts and served over 700 bottles of cold water at Maumelle's 4th of July celebration. Some have given money to keep the Dick Johnson Camp operating this summer. We have people who organize the readings for Sunday worship, cook for Lenten dinners and bake communion bread. Others have worked on our website and facebook pages, served at the diocesan convention and set up our worship space each week. I'd say we have far more than 5 loaves and 2 fish, wouldn't you? Ministry, mission and miracles always begin with giving what you have and then trusting God to multiply it to His glory. As we go about the business of living out our faith, we are, in reality, taking our loaves and fish and giving them to Jesus to multiply. You may very well be doing the same thing in your personal life. When Jesus' disciples

looked at the need and looked at what they had they noted a gap. There were in excess of 5,000 people there that day and they had enough food for one. That left a gap of 4,999 plus the women and children. Maybe you're facing a gap right now, too. Perhaps it is a gap between your income and your outgo, or maybe it is a gap between the doctor's diagnosis and your plan for a long and active life.

Sometimes there are gaps between our hopes for our loved ones and the reality created by decisions they, or we, have made. Do you know what you do with those gaps? You give them to Jesus. You do what you can and then you leave the rest in His hands. And that is a very good place to leave them, because that is the place where miracles happen. Amen.