

Grace and peace are yours dear friends in Christ; from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Last week Jesus fed the five thousand in the wilderness; the disciples got into the boat and crossed the lake only to meet Jesus in the midst of a storm, who then guided them safely to shore. The gospel text of John is continuous for the next few weeks and while last week we spoke of a storm that Jesus did not calm; the wind (on the water with the disciples) was not the only storm that was raging.

The people who were fed (the five thousand) were much like the storm that stirred up the waters of the Sea of Galilee. You see my friends, Jesus did something the people of the day did not realize or understand because they had not been granted the measure of faith to understand who Christ was, yet. The miracle of feeding the five thousand is even more a miracle when you hear; the rest of the story.

God fed Israel in the wilderness with Manna and Elisha fed 100 with 20 loaves; both signs of the salvation to come to the whole world. Today in our gospel text I want you to consider what Jesus truly did in the midst of the five thousand people in the wilderness on the grassy place. Turn back the pages of Scripture to the very beginning of our relationship with God and the day when we were exiled from the Garden.

Listen: “Then the LORD God said, “See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”—²³ therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken.²⁴ He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.”¹

When Jesus fed the five thousand, he placed the very tree of life in the midst of sinners and allowed them to eat. The people ate the fruit they had only heard of through the prophets, the law, and the priests. And look who is eating this fruit...Not the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Scribes, the Authorities; it is the common and lowly sinner who in humble faith heard the stories of miracles; saw the signs, and traveled to search for Jesus who are given the bread of life. Jesus is faithful (always faithful) and God provides. They searched and they found, they knocked and a door was opened, they asked and they received.

Like any story of faith, there is more here than meets the eye (at first glance anyway), because the gifts from God are never an end in itself, but rather the means to an end and the means by which others will come to know what God has done for the world through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Five thousand people received the bread of life; five thousand people ate from the tree of life that was removed from our presence; **and they were satisfied**. However, the satisfaction was not from hunger or thirst for they tasted the true and perfect relationship with God [again] for the first time in their life. Like Peter, James, and John on the mount of transfiguration, this is a good feeling and a great place to be. However, for the five thousand, their faith was not what God provided to the disciples and they did not know what to do with the feelings that raged within them.

¹ Genesis 3:22-24 - NSRV

We know there is a conflict within the five thousand because of the words recorded in Holy Scripture. The crowd engages Jesus in a conversation and wants details to Jesus's responses. They want clear answers to which they do not have the faith to see. We can recognize their lack of faith, because we see them refer to Jesus as 'sir'. Any others in the presence of Jesus when a miracle has been performed have recognized, identified and called Jesus by name; "Lord, Messiah, Master, or Christ."

In all things, my dear friends, in Christ, we must accept that faith comes from God alone! Those who do not see Christ [yet] have not been granted the faith to believe. The five thousand in the gospel like many multitudes of people today have much respect for Jesus but have not been given the faith to see Him as Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God.

We have eaten the bread of life and the fruit from the tree of life and through faith we are able to see, understand, and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ in the world today. This is food that truly changes the nature and character of who we are; this strengthens us in mind, body, heart, and soul for service to God and to the glory of God alone. This food sustains us in storms of every type and securely anchors us to the rock and solid foundation of none other than Jesus Christ.

Once we have been given new life, what will we do with it? What did the five thousand do? The five thousand wanted it for themselves, which quickly turned into disappointment for them because God's gifts are not for the few, but for all. God's Word, Promises, and Hope are not for the select; but for ALL. To this, there can be no exception.

Once we have new life, we share it with the world my friends. Just as Christ shared His life with all who would follow, so we too are called to share in every way that we have been gifted, blessed, and equipped. When we give all that we have, the blessings are abundantly restored, renewed, and replenished for the needs of the many who will follow those we care for today.

This is what life 'tastes' like my friends! Once we have eaten the fruit of the Tree of Life, there is a desire, a will, and a deep-seated need to be in relationship with our gracious God for the sake of our life-together with each other.

It is not always easy to see what each message in Holy Scripture is saying and the value of giving away something that is so precious and so essential to life. Consider 'knowledge' and the value to the world when knowledge is shared. When knowledge is not shared, it benefits the few and can become a means of power and control over others. A very good example of this is the knowledge that comes with understanding and using technology today. It's true. Technology can be a threat to those with no experience, a frustration for those with some experience, and a means of control for those who manage and design tomorrow's solutions.

And yet, when knowledge is shared, taught, and experienced it becomes the foundation for others to build upon. And so it is with us once we have eaten the bread of life. Our lives and our faith becomes the bricks that are placed upon the solid foundation of Christ alone. Each new generation takes faith, strength, and hope from the previous one and each being sustained by the love of God through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The bricks of generations past, present, and future are building the Church of God that is the Body of Christ in the world. This is the everlasting structure that can only grow when we pass on the gifts that are uniquely given to us for the sake of others...so the peace that passes all understanding will keep our hearts through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen