

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 12)
Sunday, July 29, 2018
Preached by the Rev. Lisa M. Erdeljon
St Michael's Episcopal Church, Barrington, IL
2 Samuel 11:1-15; Psalm 14; Ephesians 3:14-21; John 6:1-21

“Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.”

Good news! I survived the Youth Mission Trip!

If you read the eSword a couple of weeks ago, then you know this was my first time ever going on a mission trip.

And here's a little secret about myself: I'm not the best with being surrounded by people 24/7. I tend to get over-stimulate (I'm an extrovert, so people make me hyper) and then I crash. And because of the anticipation of said crash, I can be very grumpy, too.

And so, the good news is, not only did I survive the youth mission trip, but so did all the teens and other adults. No crashing, not too much grumpiness (people learn quickly: coffee always comes before human interaction), and built-in time for quiet preserved us all.

Kay did an excellent job putting all the pieces together; Paul planned a great service project; Judy planned the perfect menu; Kim and Dave were “on top of” the church van (which, of course, was acting up the whole time); and Kirk kept teens working hard.

And every teen stood out as a hard worker; every teen did everything they could to stay on top of the project, and focused on getting our tasks done.

But, sometimes things happen. Sometimes the unexpected shows up, and plans change.

Sometimes, the task at hand has to shift. And that is exactly what happened to us.

Last Sunday (wow! Only 1 week ago?!?!), Paul led a 4-hour training on how to shingle a roof. The kids had fun and learned a lot!

The training was, of course, in anticipation of shingling the roof of a house in Gary, Indiana. But you already know this because we talked about it nonstop!

Everyone was excited to learn a new skill and then use it!

But, then we got there. We saw the house, and we started the work.

And things did not look good.

With 5 blocks of work time (each block was about 4 hours long), it took more than 1 whole block of time just to get the old shingles off.

Turns out, it's really hard to get 5 layers of shingles off a roof.

And then, once the wood was exposed, we had even more issues. Water damage, fire damage, animal damage, and just, plain, old, wood damage...

All the usual ware and tare of a 70 year old house, except add the fact that minimal maintenance was done.

And so, it wasn't until the last 2 hours of our 20 hours of labor that we even began to shingle.

Once that started, the teens were in full force, full speed, hard working mode. Nails and shingles. Felt and ice guard. Things were going as fast as possible.

But it wasn't fast enough.

In the end, we only managed to get about half of one side of the roof shingled.

You can imagine the disappointment. You can imagine the pleas of, "just a little bit more time!"

"Can we have one more hour today?"

Yes! Yes, ladies and gentlemen, our teens were begging to work more!

But, ultimately, we ran out of time. And we had to leave the project half done.

...

I read today's Gospel a few weeks ago. Knowing I'd be on the mission trip this week, my sermon writing process was extended—starting earlier, but with a big pause in the middle of it.

Of course, I got really excited to see that today was not one, but two miracles. Two of my favorite miracles. Two of the best known miracles.

In fact, the feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle that appears in all 4 Gospels. Granted, each Gospel narrative has slightly different nuances, but overall, the story prevailed then, and still prevails now.

I suspect, I don't even have to walk through the miracle. We all know that there was a huge crowd following Jesus. And then it was time to eat. And no one had any food. Except for some small kid who only had 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. And Jesus said, "Give it to them anyway." And somehow, magically, there was enough to feed 5,000 people. Plus, there was extra leftover!

And the line that really struck me comes right in the middle of John's telling of this miracle story.

"Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted."

“As much as they wanted!”

And then, it continues, “When they were satisfied...”

So not just “as much as they wanted,” but even more... beyond being satisfied.

And with that line, a question emerged in my head... and it’s been circling there ever since.

What would you multiply?

If you could multiply something to have “as much as [you want],” what would you want?

For the teens on the mission trip this week, I imagine they would want more time. Time enough to not only finish the one side of the roof, but to finish the whole roof.

Time enough to work on the inside of the house, too.

Maybe even time enough to see the whole house brought to completion—done and ready for a family to move in.

And now that they are home, I suspect the teens would want more sleep. Enough sleep to have as much as they wanted—which, I’m pretty sure, would mean not waking up until next week!

And what about you? What would you multiply? What would you want?

What is the miracle you pray for in your life?

Maybe it’s mundane, like more time to clean the house, or more time to play with your dog (that might be one of mine)

Maybe it’s on a global scale, like more peace in the world, more love for the stranger, more hope for a promising future.

Maybe it’s political, and has to do with the current hot-button issues in Washington.

Maybe it’s personal, like more time with that loved one you lost too early, or more ways to express your love to someone you care deeply about.

Maybe it’s a better job or higher pay, so you can feel more financially secure, or more prepared for retirement, or more able to provide for your family.

Whatever it is, though, I suspect you can quickly think of a dozen things you would want multiplied, until you had “as much as [you] wanted”!

...

But while we’re so busy thinking about what we want multiplied... I wonder if we are overlooking the power of Jesus’s miracles in our current state—in our lives and the lives around us.

I wonder if we are selling ourselves short, and as a result, are also selling Jesus short.

When we want something in our lives multiplied—when we want some miracle to occur for us—are we denying God’s miraculous role in our lives and this world already?

In a preaching commentary, Cheryl Bridges Johns writes, “When placed in the hands of Jesus, human weakness and finitude become more than enough.”

“Human weakness and finitude become more than enough.”

We can ask for our own miracles. We can ask God to multiply something in our lives to satisfy us “as much as [we want].” We can even pray for God to provide for us, that which we seek.

But are we praying, “Lord, give me what I want”? Or are we praying, “Lord, give me what You want”?

“Human weakness and finitude become more than enough” for God, for Jesus, to work the miracles we seek. To multiply what we feel is not enough.

In the miracle of the feeding of 5,000, Jesus provides enough for everyone to have “as much as they wanted.”

So full, so satisfied, was everyone that there were even 12 baskets of leftovers—fragments of bread. For the next time the crowd is hungry.

Jesus provides not just “as much as they wanted” but even more! More than the crowd needed. More than the disciples need. More than we need.

The miracle of feeding 5,000 is more than just a magic trick of changing 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish into a full meal.

The miracle is that God provides. God provides what we need. And God provides more than we need.

The trick, on our part, is to see that—to see the miracles around us—to know that, our weaknesses, our limitness, our finitude are also miraculous.

...

The teens certainly wanted more time. They wanted the miracle of being able to finish a task that was too great to finish.

And while the roof was not fully shingled when we left, I suspect the teens still got that miracle.

Because while we were unable to finish shingling even one side of the roof.

We were able to engage a community, empower people in Gary, show the love of Christ to people who, otherwise, feel the pinch of not having enough, not knowing what it means to have “as much as they wanted.”

We kept asking the teens to look for “God moments” or “God sightings.”

And the greatest God moment—the greatest miracle we witnessed performed by God this week—was the very presence of the teens, and their hard working hands, and their love for each other (no one got in a fight! Amazing!) and their love for Christ’s work in the world.

So the next time you pray, “God, give me…” and you are asking for more of something, know that, while you may not get it all—you may not be as satisfied as the crowd was some 2,000 years ago.

You may be getting just enough—enough of what God wants you to have—what God provides to you.

And the miracle is, sometimes, we are lucky enough to see that come true. Sometimes we are lucky enough to know that God’s miraculous work is around us every day.

Sometimes we are lucky enough to see and know the multiplied gifts God gives to each on of us.

And that’s pretty miraculous.

Amen.