

Reflection: John 6.1-21

On the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, in an area where much of the ministry of Jesus occurred, there is a small church at a place called Tabgha. Built by Benedictine Fathers in 1982, this church is on the site of two earlier churches, the first built about A.D. 350 and the second about a hundred years later. The second church was destroyed in the early seventh century, and over 1,300 years passed before archaeologists excavated the site and found the remains of the two churches.

In their excavations the archaeologists found a beautiful mosaic that had formed part of the altar of the second church building. The mosaic shows a basket of loaves, with a fish on either side of the basket. Very early in the Christian community's life, this site was apparently regarded as the place where Jesus feeding of the multitude occurred.

It is not surprising that the early Christians would have marked this particular event from the life of Jesus. This miracle story, or "sign" as John would have designated it, was very important in the early church.

It is the only miracle of Jesus that is reported in all four Gospels.

After a particularly intense period of ministry, Jesus had gone off by himself. But the crowds followed him, and at the end of the day they were hungry. So Jesus had the people sit down; he took five loaves and two fish from a boy in the crowd, gave thanks to God, and distributed the food.

After everyone had eaten, the disciples gathered up twelve baskets of fragments. And the crowd wanted to make Jesus king...but he went off by himself.

What should we make of this experience reported by all the Gospel writers?

All kinds of attempts have been made to rationalize the story:

...everyone who had food must have shared it;

...the feeding really referred to spiritual food;

...it was a symbolic prefiguring of Holy Communion;

...it was a literal miracle of multiplying food.

But all these approaches seem to miss the point.

The text leaves an element of mystery in the account. It says only that the people ate what they wanted and were satisfied...It preserves the element of mystery.

Halford Luccock wrote: “The story is a wonderful picture of a tremendous truth of Christian history, that Jesus does multiply above measure for human use whatever of worth is put into his hands. Whatever we give him, he will enlarge for the service of human need.”

And George Buttrick once said: “The main truth is that of alliance between man’s little and God’s abundance. Let reminder be given for our cheer that, if we do what we can in trust and consecration, God will give the increase.”

Is it not sufficient to say that our task as disciples is simply to do what we can in trust and consecration and leave the increase to Christ?

Is it not sufficient to say that our task as disciples is to offer what we can to the causes of Christ.

Our efforts, our prayers, our concerns, our time, and our gifts...we offer all this in love, and we allow Christ to take what we offer and make it far more than we could ever imagine?

The reason I believe the early Christians regarded this experience of Jesus so seriously; is that they had seen the attractive and expansive power of the gospel to nourish spiritual hunger and to minister to physical need.

And this experience from the life of Jesus reminded them of both dimensions of the gracious and loving ministry of Christ and the His church.

They believed in the miracle of multiplied witness because they had both received and shared in its life changing power.

Let us pray...

**Sustainer of the hungry,
like a mother you long to feed your children
until each is satisfied.**

**Turn our eyes to you alone,
that, aware of our own deepest longings,
we will reach out with Christ
to feed others with the miracle of your love. Amen.**