

2017-08-06 - Year A - Pentecost 8-3

Nehemiah 9:16-21; Psalm 78:13-25; Romans 8:35-39; Matthew 14:13-21

Children's Sermon¹

- Hudson Taylor, Missionary to China in the late 1800s
- Suddenly left in charge of a hospital and the funds were running very low
- Patients were getting nervous, wondering what would happen to them.
- The cook told Taylor that he had just opened the last bag of rice and that it was disappearing quickly.
- Taylor replied "Then the Lord's time for helping us must be close at hand."
- He continued to pray, and before the rice ran out, 50 pounds appeared with a letter from a friend. It had been sent five months earlier, there is no way he could have known the situation. He also wanted to know if he could continue to support the hospital mission!

Introduction

- Story about shoes wearing out after lots of walking last summer and fall.
- Nehemiah 9:19-21 - God richly provided for the Israelites for 40 years in the wilderness.
- This story of the Exodus and of God's provision for his people in the wilderness became an important corporate memory for the Jews.

Messianic Overtones

- There is a distinct connection between our Gospel passage and these events in the OT.
 - These events happen in a "desolate place" v. 15
 - Jesus provides abundant bread
- There was an expectation in first century Palestine that the coming of the Messiah would be accompanied by a repeat of this bread in the wilderness sign.
 - In 2 Baruch 29:8 it says "'It shall come to pass at that time that the treasury of manna shall again descend from on high, and they will eat of it in those years, because these are they who have come to the consummation of the ages.' Such was the expectation in many Jewish circles in the first century AD, and Jesus fulfilled it."²
- Jesus didn't have to feed this crowd. It would have been perfectly reasonable to send them into the towns as his disciples suggested. Jesus wanted to make a statement!
 - In ordering the crowd to sit down on the grass, we hear an echo of Psalm 23:2, "He makes me lie down in green pastures."
 - This wasn't just about providing food, it was the great shepherd gathering his sheep to form a new Messianic community. A sign that the Kingdom of Heaven had come, and also a foretaste of the banquet to come.
 - Through these actions, Jesus declares once again that he is the Messiah. This miracle is a demonstration of who he really is.

¹ Based on the telling of this story found here:

<http://blog.godreports.com/2013/07/hudson-taylors-last-bag-of-rice/>

² Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven* (The Bible Speaks Today; Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 167.

Miraculous Provision

- This miracle is also a demonstration of an important aspect of God's relationship with his people. That of "provider."
- The Bible is full of stories of God's miraculous provision. Stories of David, Elijah, Elisha, Nehemiah, and many others.
- Jesus is showing the crowd that God is still powerful and still able to provide bread for his people in the wilderness.
- He doesn't just provide a little, he provides with abundance! Jesus was showing off!
 - Standard Jewish loaf of bread was considered to be a meal for 3.
 - Jesus takes this small amount of bread and fish and turns it into enough to feed 5000 men plus women and children.
 - "They all ate and were satisfied" v. 20. Their bellies were full.
 - The quantity of the leftovers was greater than the quantity of the five loaves and two fish!
- This is who God is. He is a loving Father who cares for his children. He provides richly.

God Still Provides Today

- God's provision isn't just something we read about in the Bible. He still provides today.
- I can't tell you how many times God has provided miraculously for our family. Our finances have often been very tight, and there have been months where we had no idea how we were going to make ends meet. But God has always provided enough.
- Trinity School for Ministry has an annual "June Miracle" as the fiscal year ends, God provides each and every year.
- Hudson Taylor said "God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supplies."³
- This is the way God works both in our personal finances and in our church finances.
- God doesn't want us to focus on money, he wants us to focus on mission. Matt 6:33.
- The biblical pattern for funding the ministry of the church is through the tithes and offerings of the people, giving 10 percent or more of their income to support the collective mission that God is calling them to.
- Just like Jesus took God the meager offering of five loaves and two fish from his disciples and turned it into a feast for thousands, God invites us to participate in his provision, taking our gifts and multiplying them to provide for all we need to accomplish his mission.

Conclusion

- Traditional Jewish prayer of blessing over a meal "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth"
- Our God is a powerful provider. Whether we recognize it or not, he is the one who brings forth bread from the earth!

³ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/gods-work-gods-way>