

“Jesus Feeds!”

Charles R. Swindoll tells the story of how “Nine-year-old Danny came bursting out of Sunday school like a wild stallion. His eyes were darting in every direction as he tried to locate either his mom or dad. Finally, after a quick search, he grabbed his daddy by the leg and yelled, ‘Man, that story of Moses and all those people crossing the Red Sea was great!’ His father looked down, smiled, and asked the boy to tell him about it.

‘Well, the Israelites got out of Egypt, but Pharaoh and his army chased after them. So the Jews ran as fast as they could until they got to the Red Sea. The Egyptian Army was getting’ closer and closer. So Moses got on his walkie-talkie and told the Israeli Air Force to bomb the Egyptians. While that was happening, the Israeli Navy built a pontoon bridge so the people could cross over. They made it!’

By now old dad was shocked. ‘Is *that* the way they taught you the story?’

‘Well, no, not exactly,’ Danny admitted, ‘but if I told it to you the way they told it to us, you’d *never* believe it, Dad.’”

Swindoll concludes, “With childlike innocence the little guy put his finger on the pulse of our sophisticated adult world where cool skepticism reigns supreme. It’s becoming increasingly more popular to operate in the black-and-white world of facts . . . and, of course, to leave no space for the miraculous.” (*“Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life”* by Charles R. Swindoll, published by Zondervan Publishing House)

All four of the gospels in the New Testament report how Jesus performed the miracle of the feeding of over 5,000 people from five loaves and two fish. It is extremely rare for all four gospels to agree, especially with reference to Jesus’ miracles. That fact indicates Jesus actually feed over 5,000 from the relatively small amount of food available to him. In addition to him providing enough food out of what was clearly incapable of being what would meet the need of all of those present, I and others have suggested some in the crowd most likely shared their own food, which is a bit miraculous too. Perhaps, both together led to such an abundance of left overs.

There is a temptation to see Jesus’ feeding of the 5,000 plus crowd as merely another sign or evidence of him being the Messiah – the Son of God. Yet, there is much more to the story of this event. For example, it provides us insight into the motivations and nature of Jesus himself. Matthew reports, ***“Jesus got out of the boat, and when he saw the large crowd, his heart was filled with pity for them, and he healed their sick.”*** **Compassion and “agape”** – self-giving and sacrificial love were embodied in Jesus. This Scripture confirms those are part of his character.

Further, the Reading presents a contrast between the way Jesus thought about and acted toward the crowd, over and against, how his original Disciples sought to treat the people. Instead of having compassion and concern for the welfare of the people, the Twelve welcomed the crowd for only as long as it was useful to their purposes – to increase their Teacher’s influence and power, so they would have greater authority and its perks. **We especially see this contrast between Jesus and his Disciples when Matthew states, *“That evening his disciples came to him and said, ‘It is already very late, and this is a lonely place. Send the people away and let them go to the villages to buy food for themselves.’”*** The Disciples were attempting to avoid additional work, so they wanted Jesus to make the people fend for themselves! Jesus, however, would not allow his Disciples’ self-interest to dictate his response toward the large crowd, so he said, ***“They don’t have to leave. You yourselves give them something to eat!”***

Then, Jesus took charge of the situation – he did not leave the thousands to the tender mercies of the Disciples! Matthew states, ***“He ordered the people to sit down on the grass”.*** Luke reports Jesus told the Disciples to organize the crowd into groups of 50. Matthew continues, ***“then he took the five loaves and the two fish, looked up to heaven, and gave thanks to God. He broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. Everyone ate and had enough. Then the disciples took up twelve baskets full of what was left over.”***

There is another aspect of what took place during this miraculous event, which is often missed, unless the report from the Gospel of John is included. It is not clear that the crowd, in general, understood they had been part of a miracle. **Yes, the Disciples were aware of the meal’s miraculous aspects but beyond them, it is doubtful there was widespread knowledge of the miracle during the event.** Matthew does not even include the immediate response of the crowd to the feeding of the thousands.

Of the four gospels, which reported Jesus feeding over 5,000 people at one time, only the Gospel of John describes the crowd’s response to the event! Leaving that detail out was a big oversight for the other gospels. The Gospel of John began its account reporting it took place near the time for the ***“Passover”*** and at the conclusion of John’s account, it

states, *“the people there said, ‘Surely this is the Prophet who was to come into the world!’ Jesus knew that they were about to come and seize him in order to make him king by force; so he went off again to the hills by himself.”* The Jewish public was oppressed by the Roman Empire and the crowd was eager to recognize Jesus had just served them a very special meal – like the first Passover Meal, which had been eaten immediately prior to Moses leading the Hebrews out of their bondage in Egypt or like the promised Messianic Feast – Banquet when God’s Kingdom is revealed! So, from the people’s point of view, Jesus showed himself to be the **“Messiah”** through the signs and wonders he performed, such as the massive feeding they just experienced! They wanted him to take the next step – to allow them to declare him their promised **“King”** and then, they would have wanted him to destroy their Roman oppressors. However, Jesus had not come to be the Warrior King the public wanted. **He knew his purpose was, instead, to create a whole new relationship between humanity and God, so he retreated from the crowd to prevent them from declaring him their king.**

The Gospel of John goes on to report the people, who ate the bread, followed Jesus to Capernaum, although they could not understand how he had gotten there. Remember, he had walked on the water to join his Disciples in a boat during the middle of the night. The Bread Crowd confronted Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum. They, of course, wanted more free bread and they wanted to force him to follow their demands for more signs – like those done by Moses, such as, providing the manna their ancestors ate. Instead, Jesus told them he came to usher in a new type of Relationship with God, one through which life is given to everyone. **Jesus declared he is the Bread from Heaven – he feeds and gives life – eternal life. He went on to also talk about the need for believers to drink his blood.** Speaking of himself, Jesus demanded, *“if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in yourselves.”*

We know Jesus was not talking about cannibalism but the sacred meal we call Holy Communion. Jesus’ feeding of over 5,000 was a precursor to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. During the confrontation with the Bread Crowd in the Capernaum synagogue, **Jesus made it clear his followers are to Eat the Bread and Drink the Cup as an act of obedience to him as our Lord.** It is my belief Jesus and his original Disciples began observing the practice of Holy Communion very soon after the Capernaum confrontation. **Yes, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, feeds us through this sacrament of Holy Communion!** By belonging to him and demonstrating it through our participation in his holy supper, we already begin to live out the New Relationship with God, which will be complete when God’s Kingdom is fully revealed.

After the confrontation, the Bread Crowd rejected and left Jesus, so only the Twelve remained. He invited them to also turn away from him but they decided their lives had no purpose without him. **Jesus feeds you, me, and all who are open to him as God’s gift for us!** In obedience to his demand, we come to share in his sacred and holy meal. It is this meal which demonstrates our equality with each other before our Divine Parent and compels us to share Christ’s invitation with all people.

Sara Miles shares the importance of Holy Communion for her life and her relationship with God, relating, “Holy communion knocked me upside down and forced me to deal with the impossible reality of God.” **“Then, as conversion continued, relentlessly challenging my assumptions about religion and politics and meaning, God forced me to deal with all kinds of other people.”** “In large ways and small, I wrestled with Christianity; its grand promises and its petty demands, its temptations and hypocrisies and promises, its ugly history and often insufferable adherents. Faith for me didn’t provide a set of easy answers or certainties. It raised more questions than I was ever comfortable with. The bits of my past - family, work, war, love - came apart as I stumbled into church, then reassembled, through the works communion inspired me to do, into a new life centered on feeding strangers: food and bodies, transformed. I wound up not in what church people like to call ‘a community of believers’ - which tends to be code of ‘a like-minded club’ – but in something huger and wilder than I had ever expected: the suffering, fractious, and unboundaried body of Christ.” (Sara Miles, “Take This Bread”)

As Jesus Christ feed over 5,000, and shared in the sacred meal of his Body and Blood almost 2,000 years ago, so he calls you, me, and all of us to come to his table – to share frequently in his Holy Communion – Love Feast, so we will unite in the New Life in Christ and the New and Eternal Relationship with our God. Will we let Jesus feed us or will we reject him and his feeding as eventually did the Bread Crowd? **Be fed by God’s Son, Jesus Christ! Amen.**