

*“Eating and Having Enough”*

[The video, “Sharefaith Trust in the Lord” was shown prior to the Prelude.]

Jesus’ Feeding of over 5,000 persons was a foreshadowing of the Messianic Feast when the Kingdom of God is Fulfilled. **It was so important to his early disciples that all four of the gospels in the New Testament included a description of it.** Three of the gospels reported the story of Jesus walking on the water later that evening, immediately after their accounts of the Feeding of the 5,000. Since Matthew, Mark, and Luke are commonly referred to as the synoptic gospels because they frequently made very similar reports about what Jesus said and did, it would be reasonable for us to expect all three of those gospels went on to describe the event of Jesus’ walking on the water. However, Luke did not include it in his gospel! The third gospel, which went on to report about Jesus walking on the water, was the Gospel of John! Furthermore, I argue the Gospel of John is often the most accurate of the gospels. In fact, the Gospel of John provides us a much fuller context of material related to the Feeding of the 5,000. Therefore, the report of the Gospel of John enables us to better understand the meaning and purpose of that miraculous event.

I came across a story on the internet, which reminds me of the confusion and lack of understanding many people have about what took place when Jesus fed more than 5,000 people. The humorous story goes, “A young preacher graduated from Bible College and was invited back to his home congregation to preach a sermon. He wanted to make a good impression. He did his best to prepare to preach to his home church. He wrote his sermon word for word and memorized it. He had a very dramatic beginning to the sermon.

He started by hitting the pulpit real hard and said, **‘Jesus took 5,000 fishes and 2,000 loaves and he fed five people!’** He paused very dramatically and pointed his finger at the congregation and said, ‘Could you do that?’ Everyone roared with laughter and he couldn’t imagine what was going on. At that point one man raised his hand. That set the young preacher off. He said, ‘Sir, you are guilty of blasphemy. How could you claim to do something that only our Lord could do?’ This man stood up and began to explain to the young preacher about the big mistake that he had made.

The preacher, when he realized what he had done, was so humiliated that he couldn’t say another word. He sat down in utter confusion and disgrace. The home church was very loving, very kind, very forgiving and they all came around and put their arms around him and they said, ‘Look, everyone makes mistakes. Forget about it. You work on this sermon and next Sunday try it again.’ They finally convinced him.

The next Sunday after working on that sermon another entire week, he stood up in front of the congregation. This time he got all of his facts and figures straight, but he started out the very same way. He hit the pulpit very dramatically and he said, ‘Jesus took five loaves and two fishes and he fed 5,000 people. Could you do that?’ The same man raised his hand. The preacher was really upset and he said, ‘Sir, how can you claim to do something like that?’ The man said, ‘With the leftovers from your sermon last Sunday.’”

Getting back to Jesus’ purpose and the meaning of his Feeding the 5,000 plus persons, I suggest we focus on a few brief portions of today’s Scripture Reading. **Matthew reported Jesus learned of the execution of his cousin, John the Baptist, and left in a boat to find a lonely place.** It is reasonable for us to understand Jesus was filled with sadness, anger, and anxiety because of the death of his relative – the evangelist, whose baptism of him had identified him as being God’s Son – the Messiah! It was a very emotional time for Jesus and he did not intend to be surrounded by a crowd of people. We are told in **verse 14**, **“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.”** Now, why did Jesus have pity for the crowd? Matthew did not address that question but we can, perhaps, surmise, the crowd had also learned of the death of John the Baptist and were saddened and depressed because of the bad news. However, let me suggest there was more to why Jesus pitied the people.

Mark’s account of the Feeding of the 5,000 also reported Jesus had pity on the people and he suggested a specific reason in **Mark 6:34b**, **“because they were like sheep without a shepherd.”** Although Mark seems to have thought the reason Jesus headed out with his disciples for “a lonely place” was to allow his original followers, who had recently returned from their missionary journey, to eat and rest, he, nevertheless, picked up on the “sheep without a

shepherd” depressed feeling of the crowd. I submit, Jesus and the crowd were greatly saddened and depressed – felt like sheep without a shepherd because of the death of John the Baptist!

Now, let’s turn to the information available in the Gospel of John to aid our understanding of the meaning and purpose of the Feeding of the 5,000. Prior to reporting the Feeding of the 5,000 event in the Gospel of John, the gospel reported on a confrontation between Jesus and the Jewish authorities about his authority and the witnesses to his authority. Jesus cited the example of the testimony of the deceased John the Baptist about his authority. Remember, in the Gospel of John, John the Baptist pointed Jesus out to some of his own disciples and told them that during his baptizing of Jesus, he became aware Jesus is the Son of God! Even more important, Jesus also asserted, his Divine Parent testifies on his behalf.

Then, later in the Gospel of John, after the Feeding of the 5,000 took place, it is reported in **John 6:14b-15**, *“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.”* As I mentioned earlier, the Gospels of John, Matthew, and Mark went on to report how Jesus walked on the water in the middle of that night. However, after walking across the lake in the Gospel of John’s account, Jesus was met in Capernaum by a crowd of people, who had been among the 5,000 persons, Jesus had feed the day before. Unfortunately, those folks were not seeking him because they understood the Feeding to be a testimony that Jesus was the Son of God and the Messiah.

At this point we return to another important verse from today’s Gospel Lectionary Reading. Remember, Matthew stated in **verse 20**, *“Everyone ate and had enough. Then the disciples took up twelve baskets full of what was left over.”* The crowd, which had followed Jesus to Capernaum, wanted more free food and more demonstrations – shows of miracles. Jesus confronted them about why they followed him to Capernaum, saying in John 6:26b-c, “you are looking for me because you ate the bread and had all you wanted, not because you understood my miracles.” Did you notice the similarity between what Jesus told the crowd in Capernaum and how Matthew concluded his account of the Feeding of the 5,000? Both spoke of the people eating and having enough or what they wanted. That begs the question, “What was the meaning of the Feeding of the 5,000?” Well, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, did not address that question but in John, Jesus went on to explain to the free food and thrill seekers that he is the true “Bread of Life” – “the real Bread from Heaven”! Furthermore, Jesus went on to demand his followers eat his body and drink his blood! Everyone responded by leaving the crazy Jesus, except the original Disciples. As I mentioned numerous times in the past, that confrontation between Jesus and the free food and thrill seekers, is evidence that he actually started what we call Holy Communion sometime prior to the Last Supper – his last meal with his original Disciples. The Sacrament of Holy Communion or the Lord’s Supper is a testimony of Jesus being the Messiah and Son of God provided by our Divine Parent. By frequently joining in this Sacrament, we eat and are truly filled – have enough, so we have the eternal food we need as citizens of God’s Kingdom – so we are enriched by the generosity of God’s Agape Love for us and all people! Or as Jesus told the crowd in Capernaum in **John 6:37-39**, *“Everyone whom my Father gives me will come to me. I will never turn away anyone who comes to me, because I have come down from heaven to do not my own will but the Will of Him Who sent me. And it is the will of Him Who sent me that I should not lose any of all those He has given me, but that I should raise them all to life on the last day.”*

Summing up, the purpose or reason Jesus fed the 5,000 plus people was twofold. He was foreshadowing the Messianic Feast of the Fulfilled Kingdom of God and he was creating the environment for believers to eat and truly be filled – have all we want and need through the New Faith Relationship with God as demonstrated in the Sacrament of Holy Communion! Our problem is, we have temptations and diversions, which lead us to be more like those free food and thrill seekers in Capernaum. **Our call is to remember our true identity as Christians and to live the New Life in Christ as participants in the New Faith Relationship with God!** Will we focus on our Christian identity – on Whom we belong to? To punctuate our need and renewed commitment, let’s watch this brief video. [The video, “Identity Restored” was shown.] Amen.