

Pentecost 10-August 6, 2023

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Church

Matthew 14:13-21

“Handing Over the Goods”

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

This miracle of Jesus has become known to most of us as the Feeding of the Five Thousand. The title even has a nice ring to it as it flows off your tongue. The Feeding of the five thousand. However, this miraculous event that not only Matthew included in his gospel, but also Mark, Luke and John teach us much more than how Jesus can provide our daily bread to large crowds. One could even argue that this title isn't very accurate since it is much more likely that 15-20,000 people were fed. This well-known story from scripture has unmistakable connections to how God cared for his chosen people in the Old Testament, and you can't help but notice how this miraculous meal where a large crowd is gathered and fed foreshadows the Last Supper when Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to the people to eat. More important than the connections of the past and the future is when you hear this story. You know that Jesus is also handing over the goods to you today.

Being handed over the goods is usually not at first met with a genuine response of appreciation. The words from our first reading for today from Isaiah don't make sense to us. We don't put the words “buy” and “without money” together in the same sentence. There must be a catch or now we say it must be a scam of some kind. When you hear of deals that are too good to be true, we are encouraged to turn such people who are offering those deals into authorities like the Better Business Bureau so that no one else might be tricked into their schemes. And as you recall, eventually Jesus was turned in for handing over not just daily bread to meet temporary needs of his followers, but also for handing over bread from heaven, the forgiveness of sins, that provides eternal life.

You don't have to go far into any story in the bible where the goods are being handed over and you soon will hear grumbling from someone. When the Israelites were freed from slavery, they grumbled to Moses that he would pray to the Lord so that they would be fed. When bread literally came down from heaven in the form of manna and quail, they weren't satisfied, so they grumbled again and wished that they were back in captivity.

It isn't always the crowd that does the grumbling either. Another story from the book of 2 Kings from the Old Testament tells that a man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, ‘Give it to the people and let them eat.’ But his servant said, ‘How can I set this before a hundred people?’ So, he repeated, ‘Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the LORD, “They shall eat and have some left.”’ He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the LORD. Sound familiar to this story about the feeding of the five thousand?

Here it is a servant of the Lord who is charged with handing over the goods to a hundred people. There are a lot less people in this story, 100 instead of 20,000 and there is more food to give, 20 loaves of barley and a sack of fresh ears of grain. But the servant of the Lord complains that there won't be enough for them to eat even though the Lord had spoken that all would eat and there would be leftovers. In this life, we are always concerned that there won't be enough. So when the Lord promises that there will be more than enough, we fail to trust this promise and get in the way of delivering the goods as we are told.

It was the disciples, the servants of Jesus who did the complaining when it was time to hand over the goods to the crowd. They wondered why these people weren't keeping track of the time so they would go back home before supper. If they planned on staying later, why didn't they pack their own lunches. You can't help but believe that the disciples just wanted the people to leave. The disciples decided to take charge of the situation and their

solution to the problem was to send the people away. Jesus turned the tables on his disciples who wanted to take control of the crowd, but with a much different remedy to the problem. Jesus told his disciples, "You give them something to eat." The disciples looked at each other and then their scarce resources which were only 2 fish and 5 loaves of bread. Did you notice that the disciples didn't seem to have any food either or just didn't offer what they had brought along? So, their only response to Jesus was "We have nothing."

The disciples could be criticized for not seeing that Jesus was right in front of them, but maybe this is the confession that Jesus was waiting to hear from his disciples. When you finally realize that you don't have anything to give and when you realize that no amount of money can buy what Jesus has to give, it is at that very moment Jesus hands over the goods.

Jesus would soon be sending these disciples out to hand over the good news of Jesus Christ to people who they might consider holding some of the good news back for themselves. Jesus was not just teaching his disciples about how to deliver daily bread and fish to all people, but Jesus was testing his disciples to see if they would be recklessly delivering his forgiveness to all sinners as he had just taught them to do in the parable of the sower.

I think it was Jim Nestigen who I have mentioned and quoted before who often used the phrase, "Handing over the goods" when he said to unconditionally deliver the gospel. Dr. Steve Paulsen taught his students to not "Chicken out, when delivering the gospel". And Jesus put it this way, "You give them something to eat."

I must confess that there have been times that I have wanted to conserve this good news that I have been given to proclaim. I have been called into several situations where people that I know very little about and my instinct would suggest it may not be good soil and it would not be a great place to scatter some seed. I am thankful that whenever I have grumbled and thought that I have nothing to give, I hear the words ringing in my ear, "Deliver the goods, don't chicken out on delivering the gospel or You give them something to eat."

There are no shortages of opportunities for all of us to hand over the goods from Jesus lately. On Friday, one of the largest crowds of people I have ever seen at East Nidaros came to hear what Jesus had to say to them amid a tragic death. Today, Eastin, Kalie, and Kroy will be handed over the promise of eternal life through the sacrament of Baptism without requiring them to do anything else today or in the future. And any effort on their part to accept or affirm this promise is to question what God has already handed over to you. And Jesus has more to give you today. As you receive the Lord's supper, you are reminded that you have nothing to give, but Jesus has already given everything you need and you will hear that forgiveness is not offered and would again suggest you have something to do, but this sacrament is given fully and completely to buy without money. And on Friday it sounds like over 80 students will come to our VBS program, without cost and be handed over what they need to hear about Jesus. Then next Sunday we will reach out beyond the walls of our churches and welcome this community to hear from a God who provides and gives freely.

When you know that Jesus has all these blessings to hand over to you, free of charge, you will be like the crowds of people who lost track of time when they came to Jesus and didn't worry that their stomachs might be getting hungry. You have again been handed the goods, the bread of life that is abundant and satisfies unlike anything else could ever do. Amen