

MAKING LITTLE INTO A LOT
Mark 8:1-9; Trinity 7; July 17-18, 2021

I think most of us are familiar with Jesus' miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand; it is the only miracle done by Him that is recorded in all four of the Gospels, besides Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Today's account of the Feeding of the Four Thousand in Mark eight (also found in Matthew 15) has many similarities to the Feeding of the 5,000: a great crowd gathered to be taught and healed; the crowd's hunger; Jesus' questions to His disciples about what they could be fed with; only a small amount of bread and fish being found; Jesus taking and the giving thanks over it and blessing it, breaking it and giving it to the disciples to feed the crowds; and the leftover pieces gathered into baskets when the supper was over.

Because of the similarities between the "5,000" and the "4,000" many people wonder why Matthew and Mark included both, especially since Luke and John did not. Liberal scholars might suggest that there were two traditions of the same feeding but with different numbers, while explaining away Jesus' miracles as pious fabrications of the Church long after Jesus was dead and buried. Biblical scholars who treat the Bible as God's inspired and inerrant Word offer their own suggestions. My understanding is that Jesus did both miracles as recorded and, because of the similarities in both, He was teaching His disciples by using repetition, something He also wants us in the Church to learn.

We are told why Jesus did this miracle: He noticed the hunger of the people and in His compassion knew that He needed to do something to help them. Jesus told His disciples that He did not want to send the people away hungry. The disciples' response to Him was that they did not know how to "feed" – literally, "satisfy" the crowd's hunger – with what they had. So we learn from the Feeding of the Four Thousand how Jesus makes little into a lot, in this case seven loaves of bread and a few fish into more than enough food for about 4,000 hungry people. After Jesus had done what His disciples could not do, Mark tells us, "**And they [the 4,000] ate and were satisfied.**" Because of Jesus, those in the crowd were able to eat their fill and be satisfied, and there was still a lot left over.

That was nice for them then, but wouldn't it be great if Jesus did something similar for us today? But the text by its nature points us away from expecting Jesus to be the source of free food. In St. John's account of the Feeding of the Five Thousand, some in the crowd were looking for Jesus to make Him their bread king, doing just that for them. Jesus warned His disciples **not to work for food that perishes but food that endures for eternal life** (Jn 6:27). Also, by the way St. Mark records today's Gospel Reading, Jesus shows us by this miracle that He has more than just temporary food in mind.

Listen closely to how Jesus did the miracle. **And [Jesus] took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, He broke them and gave them to His disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd. And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, He said that these also should be set before them. And they ate and were satisfied.** In which other setting did Jesus take bread, give thanks or bless it, and give it to His disciples, and then finish with the instruction to **"this do,"** that is, give to others like He had given to them?

We hear the same pattern of words during every Divine Service in the institution of the Lord's Supper: Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me..." This pattern set by Jesus was introduced by Him at the miracles of the "5,000" and the "4,000", even though those feedings were not the Sacrament of His body and blood. What are some things we learn about the Lord's Supper from those earlier feedings?

They begin with the hunger and need of the crowd and Jesus' compassion for them, His desire to help and satisfy their need. The people in the crowds were away from home, hungry with nothing to feed themselves. Only Jesus could provide what they needed. The people in this world are in the same situation spiritually, even we who are Christians in the Church. We all are sinners and lack the righteousness of God, which we cannot provide for ourselves. The world is a **desolate place** where we live and suffer until we die. But God does not want us to die and perish in our sins so He sends His Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus has compassion on us when He sees us in our need and He does something about it. He gives His body and sheds His blood on the cross to forgive our sins. He rises from the dead promising us new and glorious bodies like His when He raises us from the dead. And the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation that Jesus has for us He includes in the Supper of His body and blood for us to eat and drink. As long as we live in this sinful, dying world we are in a desolate place and need Jesus to feed us with what only He can provide.

We, who have no righteousness in ourselves, hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus, who blesses us: **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied** (Mt. 5: 6). This is the same word for “satisfied” that Mark used to describe the crowds after they ate. They were filled up with bread and fish that day, and we are filled up with the righteousness of God in Jesus by eating and drinking His body and blood in the Sacrament.

The reason we come together as Christians in church for the Divine Service is the same reason that those crowds of people were out in a desolate place: they had to be where Jesus was to hear Him teach God’s Word and to receive the gifts only He could give. Jesus has compassion on us here in this Service and will feed us with what we need to live. Why do so many people show so little desire to come to church? Don’t they have any hunger or thirst to receive Jesus’ body and blood in the Sacrament? They would be here every time they could if they felt that need.

The Lord’s Supper is similar to the Feeding of the Four Thousand also in that Jesus takes something little and makes it into a lot: seven loaves of bread and a few fish became a lot of food that satisfied the hunger of a crowd, with plenty left over. A little wafer of bread and sip of wine won’t do much for our bodies, but in, with, and under that little bread and wine we are given a lot: Jesus’ own body and blood, which satisfies our hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God.

People without true faith in Jesus think Christians are silly for making such a big deal about receiving the Lord’s Supper in their churches. “What’s the difference between watching it on TV or a Livestream and being there in person? It only a little bread and wine!”

Jesus gave the bread and fish to the disciples to give to the people. Pastors in the Church carry out the ministry that Jesus first gave to His disciples, whom He designated as apostles, His “sent ones.” Jesus took bread, blessed it with thanksgiving to God, broke it and then gave to His disciples to give to the crowds to eat and be satisfied. Jesus does the same with the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. When Jesus is done handling the elements, blessing them with His Word as heard spoken by pastors to the Church, He instructs pastors to distribute the bread and wine which are His body and blood to those who come in faith in Him.

The Lord’s Supper has never been some sort of “self serve buffet” that any Christian has authority to administer to himself. The pattern that Jesus set from the beginning is what He wants done now and until He comes in glory: from Him to His disciples/apostles/pastors to the people. The Lutheran Church has correctly summarized this biblical teaching in Article XIV of the *Augsburg Confession*. “Our churches teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call” (*Concordia*, pg 39).

The world is still a desolate place. Jesus still has compassion on us hungry people in this desolate place and feeds us. It does not look like very much when we see the little wafer and get the sip of wine, and without the eyes of faith we might despise it as something insignificant. But with faith in Jesus, we believe that He makes little into a lot, satisfying our hunger and thirst for righteousness with His own body and blood.

“O living Bread from heaven, How well You feed Your guest!” (*LSB* 642.1). Amen.