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Proper13B21
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Last week we heard the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000,
feeding the multitude.

Today, we hear the followup.

Every gospel includes this story.

With variations;
with subtle differences,
but Jesus feeding the masses
is important enough
to be put right alongside the passion,
crucifixion,
and resurrection
in every one of the gospel stories.

Let's imagine the scene from last week, in our own terms.

Imagine you go to a concert at Sweetland,
the Travis Tritt concert just a couple of weekends ago.

It was sold out!
2,500 people there.
Now double the amount.

So there's men and women and children
crawling all over the hillside;
there's people sitting in each other's laps in the seats;
the area in front of the stage with all the tables
is swarming with people.

Now, think about the lines at the food trucks and the catering tents,
only double the normal lines,
because double the normal amount of people.

Think about waiting in those lines.

And the rumor goes around that they are ALL out of food.

There's not a bit to eat,
except Joyce at 505 Eats has
2 chicken salad sandwiches
and five springrolls.

Wouldn't you send everybody home too?

Wouldn't it just make sense to get up on the stage at the microphone
and say to everybody,

"I know you came for a show,
and some of you snuck in here without a ticket
you were so excited.

But the bathrooms are out of order
and the food is all gone;
you ain't gotta go home,
but you got to get out of here."

Isn't that what you would say?

Yes.

I can go ahead and answer for you.

Yes,

you would send them home,
and so would I,
because that's the right thing to do.

You can't imagine keeping all those people happy
with just that little bit of food.

It's impossible.

Turns out Jesus has other ideas.

Remember, every gospel includes this story.
Children learn it in Sunday school.
It's a great story.

 But it's a little unbelievable.
Every gospel includes this story,
 but it's only here in John's gospel
 that Jesus actually *serves* the food.
 "Then Jesus took the loaves,
 and when he had given thanks,
he distributed them to those who were seated;
 so also the fish,
 as much as they wanted."

Jesus does the work.
Jesus feeds the people.
 And then they wanted to make him a king.

We would too.
 I mean anybody who had that much power,
we would put them in charge,
 give them dominion
 and tell them to fix all our problems.

I mean that man can work miracles.
 If there's anything we're in constant need of,
 it's a miracle worker or two.
We're always looking for somebody to work a miracle.

If you doubt it,
look at the way we do politics.
What do we call our elections
when there's no presidential candidate on the ballot?

Mid-Terms

Well, it's not the middle of the term for the people running;
it's the end of their term.
No, it's the middle of the president's term.

What do we call elections in odd years,
when there are no federal offices up for election -
"off year elections."

Get into a philosophical discussion
and everyone will likely agree that local elections matter.
Look at voter turn out,
and you will see a different story.

We all know who the president is;
how many fewer people know their two senators,
or their house rep?

I don't even want to admit
how few of my state and local officials I could name!

It's something about wanting a miracle worker.
The president can fix the economy!
The president can fix infrastructure!
The president can do it all!

But Jesus wants nothing to do with it.
"When Jesus realized that they were about to come
and take him by force
to make him king,
he withdrew again to the mountain by himself."

And that was last week.
That was the feeding of the 5,000.

Today we hear the rest of the story:

The people who remained after the feeding of the five thousand
saw that Jesus was gone,
and his disciples too.

They went looking for him,
and when they found him they said,
“Rabbi, why did you leave?”

And he answered them,
“You came only looking for food.
Don’t seek the food that you eat
and then need to eat again;
seek the food that endures for eternal life.”

Or said another way,
“I gave you a miracle;
why did you come looking for another one?”

I’m telling you
that there’s bigger things than miracles out there.

What’s bigger than a miracle?
Eternal life.

Now, I'm not talking about getting saved.
If getting saved were all there was to it,
then it wouldn't be worth all that much,
now would it?

I mean, how big a god does it take to say,
"Do the right things,
believe the right things,
and pray the right prayer
- and you'll live forever." ????

That's not much of a god.
Might as well be Zeus
or Pharaoh
or an infomercial you see at 10:30 on a Tuesday morning.

That could be me or you saying that:
"do the right things,
believe the right things,
say the right things to me
- and I'll love you forever"
(as long as you keep it up anyway).

God has got to be bigger than that.
The love that God Almighty offers,
has got to be bigger
than the kind of love that we can imagine offering.

Eternal life isn't about punching your ticket to heaven.
And even if it was,
the kind of a God we're talking about
- your ticket's already punched.

No, eternal life is more than some miracle
- it's more than a little bread and a few fish
becoming enough to feed the multitude.

That's a miracle.
But it's not eternal life.

Today,
we are about to witness another miracle.

It's the kind of miracle that we have grown accustomed to,
but we've all missed it for a while!

We've been having Eucharist every Wednesday night since late October,
but we are about to celebrate it on a Sunday morning
for the first time in forever!

It's a miracle.
If you *know* that God is with you,
because we all prayed over some bread and wine
-it's a miracle.

But that's all it is...
just a miracle.

It's not eternal life.

We come here expecting a miracle
- we take it for granted
and we should.

But the miracle is supposed to open our eyes,
to make it plain
that eternal life is not something way off out there in heaven.

Eternal life is something right here,
among us,
between us,
erasing every division,
replacing every heart of stone
with a new and a living heart.

God didn't set the world to ticking
and then make a little adjustment
over in Palestine about 2,000 years ago.

God is at work in the world today.
There's miracles, sure
- whatever kind of miracle you want to believe in.
But those miracles
are only meant to be a sign of something bigger.

Jesus didn't come to be a miracle worker.
Jesus came to proclaim eternal life.

Maybe you've noticed:

I have yet to tell you what eternal life is.

I've spent a little time talking about what it's not.

I have some idea what it is,
at least right here (gut).

But I'm having the hardest time
getting it out into the space between you and I.

So I reached for a little help
from my old friend Frederick Buechner.

*When you are with somebody you love,
you have little if any sense of the passage of time,
and you also have, in the fullest sense of the phrase, a good time.*

*When you are with God,
you have something like the same experience.*

*The biblical term for the experience is Eternal life.
Another is Heaven.*

*We think of Eternal Life,
if we think of it at all,
as what happens when life ends.*

*We would do better
to think of it
as what happens when life begins.¹*

¹ Buechner, Frederick. *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC*. p. 25-26

I am grateful every time I get to stand behind that altar,
and say those prayers.

I am grateful because of all the miracles that happen:
bread and wine become sacraments of Divine Love
the great cloud of witnesses, surrounding us
my grandmother and yours.
Ms. Eula Jackson and Don Russell -
They are all here with us,
Celebrating with us.

But the miracle is just the beginning.

After the miracle,
we go looking for eternal life.
Because of the miracle,
we just might see it all around us.

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All those people came looking for Jesus,
after he'd worked that miracle.

They wanted to make him a king,
they wanted another miracle.

And Jesus said,
“Don't come looking for a miracle;
go looking for eternal life.”

I'm left with just one question:
if eternal life means being with God,
why in heaven's name
would you want to wait
until you're dead?