

St. Andrew's UMC  
August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008  
Matthew 14: 13-21  
“And All Ate, and Were Filled”

I watched a TV program about a train ride. The railroad was called White Pass and Yukon , and it meandered through the breath-taking beauty of the Alaskan wilderness.

At the end of the line, a few scruffy backpackers got on the train. They had just returned from the wilderness backpacking trip. I wondered, if there were any other that could top this ride. A great train ride through the beautiful wilderness to backpack into even more remote wilderness at the end of the line, and then, after having become one with the wilderness, hop back on the same train home. I will have to put this train ride on my “To-Do-Before-I-Die” list.

At the time the railroad was built, it was deemed at par with such an engineering marvel as the Eiffel Tower in Paris , according to one Railroad enthusiast in the program. He said that, if we were to build the railroad today, it would take at least \$10 Billion and 10 years to complete it.

Then he added the reason why the 19<sup>th</sup> century people were motivated to complete such a great project of railroad into the wilderness: Gold. Gold was discovered near Dawson City , along the Klondike River . That brought a frenzy of gold rush immigration to Yukon . About 12.5 million ounces of gold in total was taken from the area since its discovery. Naturally, people needed mass transportation, so they built White Pass and Yukon .

It seems that is how things get done in the human society: you flash the people with the vision of striking rich. Nothing can stop the people burning with the gold fever. When you think about it, it is greed that drives people to go to the extreme to accomplish amazing things. If gold weren't discovered, Alaska would not be what it is today.

Greed is such a powerful thing, yet it is completely powerless in a certain sense. You do not hear that thousands of people built a railroad track through the desert or the wilderness, in order to reach the starving mass of people. Greed is purely selfish, and when it comes to doing unselfish things,

greed is completely powerless. Greed has no handle on those who are not interested in selfish things.

Today's reading tells the story of how Jesus fed 5000 men, not counting women and children. Jesus had just heard that John the Baptist was beheaded. He went into the wilderness to be alone with the disciples. The crowd followed to where Jesus was. Seeing the crowd, Jesus healed the sick and taught them. The day was getting late, and the crowd did not have anything to eat or drink. So the disciples wanted to get rid of the crowd, and asked Jesus to send them away.

Jesus told his disciples to give the crowd something to eat. Of course, they had only five loaves and two fish. To make the story short, Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, and somehow stretched them into enough meals to feed the crowd of 5000 plus.

We know that Jesus tested his disciples, knowing fully well that his disciples could not themselves feed the crowd of thousands. It is as if Jesus was telling himself, "I will see what expression these guys wear, just for grins."

In a way, it may not seem fair to the disciples, but faith journey is like that. For the faithful, God provides the opportunity, so that they could grow in the faith.

Faith does not grow on free lunches. Faith grows by facing the challenge and grappling with it. God allows the faithful to face the stressful situation, and expects them to pool their gifts, graces, and resources, in order to solve the question by themselves.

It is pooling their gifts, graces, and resources that is so difficult to accomplish. Individually, people have no problem applying their own gifts, graces, and resources for the individual's own benefit. But for the benefit of others, it is a totally different story. Pooling their talents and resources for the commonly shared goal that benefits others is an extremely difficult thing to accomplish. There is no room for greed to wedge itself here.

Most times, the faithful find themselves tackling those seemingly impossible and unwanted things, or struggling with even less attractive things. What motivates them to do those?

If we look at this story of miracle from the perspective of the kingdom of Heaven, it fits the parable of mustard seed. Something small and insignificant grows big, and benefits the many. The five loaves and two fish were amplified enough to feed the crowd of 5000 plus.

The skeptic might brush away the miraculous part of the story, saying it is not possible to feed 5000 with five loaves and two fish. The faithful will respond to the skeptic this way: Alright, then: whom will your five loaves and two fish feed?

The way of the kingdom of Heaven is not concerned with how many thousands were fed. The kingdom of heaven is rather concerned with this question: “Who is willing to put up his or her last five loaves and two fish to share with others?”

We may want to look beyond the spotlight on the miracle story. How does the miracle shape our faith in Jesus? Are we supposed to train ourselves to expect miracles at every stressful moment, so that those who confess faith in Jesus receive the special privilege of living stress-free? Is that the ultimate purpose of faith—to attain the stress-free life? Somehow God is responsible for getting rid of our stresses?

The way of the kingdom would rather ask the faithful to deal with the stresses, rather than getting rid of them. For example, the kingdom of Heaven will ask the faithful what they could do, in order to solve the problem of hungry people. There are two ways of going about: 1) Get rid of the crowd. That is what the disciples suggested to Jesus. 2) Get more food. That is what the disciples thought up, but immediately relented, because it was just too expensive. Jesus had another approach: bring the five loaves and two fish to me.

The faithful may or may not believe what they do will result in a miracle. They know what they give is meager, compared to the enormity of the challenge. The faithful will give their five loaves and two fish, not because they know there will be a miracle, but because they know that their giving would benefit someone.

That reason is not going to convince people to build a railroad into the wilderness. But that is good enough a reason for the faithful. It will convince the faithful to share their last five loaves and two fish.

In the real world, we do not need to be rich, in order to feed others. Five loaves and two fish can feed five, maybe. If there were two who are each willing to put forward five loaves and two fish, they will feed 10.

Surely, no one will be able to duplicate the miracle Jesus performed. Performing miracle is not what we are called to. We are called to do what is within our capacity, utilizing our gifts, grace, and resources. Any one of us can feed 10.

What does bringing the five loaves and two fish to Jesus mean to us today? It means pooling our gifts, graces, and resources in Jesus' name.

We serve dinners occasionally at Clara-Mateo Alliance. At each occasion, we are asked to fill out the estimate of expenses. We estimated about \$300 for total amount of food that some of us purchased and prepared last time. That translates into about 75 meals served. We are not talking about stretching the dollars and exacting the measurement of the weight of the food on the plate. We are talking about everyone being fed a generous portion of delicious, home-made meal, and being satisfied. That comes out about \$4 per meal per person.

We feed consistently in one evening almost twice the number of people who attended the worship earlier that morning. I can tell you what happened that evening: all ate, and were filled, just as the Bible says.

That is a good enough reason for our congregation to pitch in whatever we could and feed those who are in need. And that is the way of the kingdom of Heaven .

Do you know the difference between the faithful and the skeptic? The faithful do not really care for miracles, but they would rather focus on people.

The skeptics, however, do focus on miracles, things, profits, and the bottom line, etc., all with impeccable logic and good reasons: in short, they are selfish. They are trained in greed. They may eat sumptuously, but they are never filled.

Who is faithful? The one who believes that Jesus fed 5000 plus with five loaves and two fish? Or, the one who feeds the hungry within one's own means?