



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Seventh Sunday After Trinity, August 7th, 2011

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
And of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠**

St. Mark's account of the feeding of the four thousand provides us with a clear picture of God's relationship with us, and it also tells us a lot about our duty to him, and what he expects from us. The miracle demonstrates both God's willingness to care for us, and his infinite ability to do so.

I say "infinite ability" because this miracle was an act of creation on a smaller scale, but of a similar order, to the act of creating the universe. The food Jesus served was not cultivated, caught and cooked in the traditional manner. It was created in a twinkling of an eye by divine will.

Jesus' feeding of five thousand hungry people, and his subsequent feeding of four thousand, demonstrates that God anticipates our needs long before we do so, ourselves. It also teaches us that even when things seem hopeless, we can rely on him for help. When Jesus performed the miracle, everybody was well aware there was no food available and no prospect of getting any.

The loaves and fishes were certainly not essential to either miracle. He could just as easily have turned stones into bread and

meat. In other words, these miracles graphically illustrate that Jesus does unhesitatingly for us what he refused to do for himself. After his 40 days fasting in the wilderness, Satan told him to satisfy his hunger by turning stones into bread. But Jesus replied: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

Jesus could, quite justifiably, have repeated the same words to the thousands who had followed him without bothering to bring food. None of them would have starved to death. They would simply have gone hungry for half a day or so – not a very high price to pay for meeting the Son of God face to face in the flesh. But Jesus didn't do anything of the kind. He took pity on them, and fed them with the tastiest food they'd ever had. (You can deduce this by the fact many of them demanded a repeat of the miracle, to get another taste of his food the very next day.)

The two feeding miracles also guarantee to his disciples (and, of course, to us) that Jesus is able to deliver on his promise at the Last Supper at which he instituted the Sacrament of the Holy Communion. His declaration: "This is my Body...This is my Blood" is not

merely an empty metaphor. It assures us he is literally fulfilling his promise (*St. John 6*): "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

In short, the miraculous feedings we read about in the Gospels continue for us today. We share in them, in more perfect form, each time we celebrate the Holy Communion – more perfect because we understand things far better than the hungry folks who Jesus fed in the Gospels.

They believed they were merely receiving physical sustenance. We know we are receiving a far more valuable gift – spiritual nourishment, and spiritual strengthening and spiritual support directly from Jesus Christ, himself.

There is, however, another lesson to be learned from this miracle. As I said earlier the loaves and fishes were by no means essential to the miraculous feeding. Jesus used the loaves and the fishes simply because they were there. A small boy offered him his lunch box and Jesus used it to perform one of the most memorable miracles in the Bible.

The lesson here is that no gift, however insignificant it might seem to us, is at all insignificant to God. Jesus' acceptance of the gift of loaves and fishes shows that God accepts everything we give him, and makes use of it in way that is infinitely more effective and far reaching than we could ever imagine.

All of us are apt to imagine that our efforts – in our churches and in our communities, for example – are puny, unimportant and unlikely to make the slightest difference in

God's great scheme of things. We imagine that only people with power -- big city politicians, state governors and the President of the United States – wield the sort of power necessary to make a real difference.

The feeding miracles demonstrate that such a notion is utterly and completely false. With God's help, a boy carrying a basket of five small bread rolls and a couple of fish provided the raw materials for a meal for five thousand men, plus women and children. Not long after, a gift of seven small loaves and few fishes enabled him to serve meals to more than four thousand.

Not even the Mayor, the Governor of the State or even the President of the United States is able to do such a thing. And this is because the resources at the disposal of the President of the United States – the most powerful man in the world – are as nothing compared with God's infinite power and infinite resources.

The feeding miracles teach us that with God's help everything is possible. God can as easily create a universe, bring about a virgin birth and engineer a resurrection as he can multiply a few loaves and fishes to feed thousands of hungry people.

The chastening thing is that it took a child to grasp this. If the bread and the fish had been in an adults' lunch basket, nobody would have come forward. It is likely that when the disciples thought a bit of a joke to hand Jesus the boy's lunch box. But the joke was on them. Similarly, if we doubt God's ability to keep his promises, the joke will be on us. *AMEN.*

To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.