

Trinity 7 (2024)

At the end of the Second World War, at least 40 million people had been displaced from their homes. Refugees moved on foot throughout Europe.

Not surprisingly, the carnage of war created many orphans. In many places, charity-run homes were set up to take care of these children.

The story is told that in one such facility the children, though provided regular meals, were restless and had trouble sleeping at night. Months of deprivation had created anxiety that was hard to overcome.

Those in charge hit on an idea. At bedtime, each child was provided a slice of bread, not to be eaten, but to be held. This slice served as a sign and pledge that their daily needs would be provided.

This simple move proved brilliant. The children's restlessness subsided, and soon they were able to sleep through the night.

In the larger scheme of things, God is the great provider.

“Give us this day our daily bread” we ask in the Lord's Prayer.

Hymn writer Cecil Frances Alexander gives us these words:

*The cold wind in the winter,
the pleasant summer sun,
the ripe fruits in the garden:
He made them every one.*

So, before we go any further, let us thank God for our daily bread. His past acts of faithfulness give us cause to trust Him for the future. *These* are our 'slices of bread' . . . our

assurance that He can be trusted to meet our needs both present and future.

Beyond this, there is the Supper of the Lord, the Holy Communion, in which bread is thrust into our hands and wine to our lips as tokens and pledges of His providence and care.

The bread of heaven and the bread of earth are joined, and, like the children of which I have just spoken, we receive the assurance we so desperately require. ///

Sometimes we limit God. We imagine He is only concerned only 'spiritual' things. Not so! Jesus, who puts a face on the invisible God, gives the lie to any such truncated view.

Before I develop this thought further, let me give some context to what we have heard read this morning.

If you recall, there are two feeding stories recorded in the Gospels. The more familiar is the feeding of the 5000. This one took place on Jewish territory. On this occasion, the food Jesus multiplied came from a little boy's boxed lunch. There were five loaves and 12 baskets collected at the end of the meal.

In contrast, the feeding of the 4000, the story recorded in today's Gospel, took place outside Jewish territory east of the Jordan in the region of Decapolis. In this account, there were seven loaves which the disciples themselves provided. **“How many loaves, have ye?”** we hear Jesus ask them.

Finally, at the end, there were seven baskets of fragments collected.

Now back to what I just saying. In both stories, we see the Son of God being interested in both people's spiritual and physical needs. In the latter story – the feeding of the 4000 – this

interest extended beyond those descended from Abraham, as almost certainly there were Gentiles present on this occasion.

The crowd had been with Jesus for three days. They had had the privilege of hearing Him teach and preach.

Jesus has set before them a spiritual smorgasbord. Yet man cannot live by good words alone.

By this time, whatever food they had brought from home had been exhausted. More than that, they were miles away from any store or market. Certainly, there were no fast-food restaurants in those days.

To send them home in this condition if it could be avoided would have been cruel thing indeed. And Jesus does not do this. The text tells us, **“He had compassion on them.”**

What a lovely statement! It reveals the heart of Jesus which is none other than the heart of God the Father.

God has compassion on you and me. He recognizes both our weaknesses and needs.

Don't ever hesitate to bring whatever is on your heart to Him. No matter is beyond His realm of concern and power to respond.

When I was in college, a young ministerial student who was struggling financially related a story which I must admit I found implausible.

He and his family were on the way to a church where he was to preach one Sunday morning when their older car began to whiz and then to stall. The fuel needle registered empty.

As he told the story, he opened the hood, placed his hand on the carburetor and prayed for

enough fuel to get to the church. Miraculously, the car cranked, and he arrived on time.

Again, at the time, I was skeptical. But now, approaching 50 years later, I say, “Why not?” If miracles of multiplication happened in olden times, why should they not happen now?

Just for the record, I’m not advocating bypassing the filling station and expecting God to do the miraculous. That would be presumption. My point is: God is concerned with all of life and with Him there are no impossible causes.

Why not make it personal? What is on your mind and heart this morning? Bring that thing to the One who has both compassion and the power to do something about the situation.

We – the Church of Jesus Christ -- must announce the Gospel. We get our marching

orders in the Great Commission: “Go make disciples.”

We must tell people that the mistakes of the past no longer have to define them. There is forgiveness of sins . . . no ‘canceling’ with God.

With the death and resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, a new power has been unleashed in the world. Transformation and change are possible.

More than that, death is a conquered foe. Because Jesus lives, those who belong to Him shall live also. Good news that must be shared. Nevertheless, people’s physical needs must not be overlooked and left behind.

There needs to be no divide between the Gospel of salvation and the so-called social Gospel. There are times we need to leave off bumping our gums and to pick up a mop or hammer.

In today's account, Jesus did what only He could do -- multiplied the bread -- but then He turned it over to the disciples to distribute. Let us learn from what we see here as well.

God call us to be participants in His work . . . to be workers together with God in the work of the Kingdom.

Listen to the still small voice within you this morning and see what He might be calling you to do. Say yes to that call. ///

Still one final application. It concerns the generosity of God and what our response should be to it.

When the food was passed out, it was more than enough just to keep body and soul together. Everyone was filled . . . satisfied.

What this suggests is the God revealed in Jesus is no stingy deity. He delights in abundance. He is a generous giver.

We, moreover, are called to follow His example. We too should be generous givers.

No more judicious statement on this subject can be found than one given by St. Paul in 1 Timothy 6, verses 17 and 18:

“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;

“That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate [share].

It has been said you cannot outgive God. This statement is true. Put this principle to the test in your life. ///

Today's Gospel, in summary, reminds us:

--Of God's concern for all of life, things, spiritual and material.

--Of God's call to us to be more than spectators on the sidelines but players on the field . . . to take an active part in His work.

--And finally, of God's generosity. He is an abundant giver. We should follow His lead.

Living out the Good News remains our focus throughout these summer months in this season called Trinity-tide. May we hear and respond to God's call beginning at this very moment.