

This past week we fed about 100 people at My Brother’s Table at First Baptist Church in Front Royal, Virginia. There are two phases of service that happens. The first is that we packed meals that were delivered by our volunteers to those in the feeding program. The second phase is the people who arrive to eat dinner at the church around 5:00 P.M..

Not knowing how many people will show up it is hard to plan exactly how much food to cook. Make too little and not everyone will get to eat, make too much and you will end up throwing food away. It is a delicate balance.

We had a delicious menu of fried chicken, green beans, potatoes, and of course bread. We even offered an extra side of bread with biscuits and gravy along with cake for dessert.

And you know we ended up having just enough. That is how God works. God continues to provide for our needs by sustaining us with the bread of life.

God has always been offering the people of God bread. In our Old Testament Scripture today from the book of Exodus 16 we see that God rained down manna from heaven in order to satisfy the desperate hunger of the Israelites in the wilderness. Their unleavened bread that they had brought with them from the Passover meal had run out and they longed to sink their teeth into something delicious.

Have you ever smelled bread that is baking? It is one of the best smells in the world!

So, God heard the cry of the Israelites and responded. In this gift of manna there was a lesson from God. God knew the Israelites would try to take as much bread as they could because they would be fearful of when they would get to eat next. Through this gift of manna, God was calling the Israelites to trust in God, showing that God would provide for their needs.

Each day God told the Israelites that they must only take what they needed and to leave the rest. If they were to take any extra manna it would rot, and they would not be able to eat it. What was amazing was that God rained down manna from heaven each day, and the people were sustained.

Again, God was teaching the Israelites to trust in God.

We see this same principle in the New Testament. Jesus shows the disciples time and time again to trust in God who will provide for their needs.

Another miracle of bread happened in the Bible when Jesus fed a crowd of 5,000 people (John 6). Rob Fuquay reminds us this event is important because it “is the only miracle story, except for the resurrection, told in all four gospels.”<sup>i</sup>

Here instead of the Israelites the disciples recognize there is a problem. A huge crowd has been following Jesus and now it is lunch time. How in the world could all these people be fed?

**What is beautiful is that God invites us to be a part of this miracle.** Instead of raining down manna from heaven again, it is the small gift from a boy of five loaves and two fish that Christ multiplies, enough to feed all 5,000 people with 12 baskets leftover.

Again, just like the Israelites in the wilderness experienced, bread is left over, not necessarily so others can take it home, but to show that God not only gives us enough to sustain us but grace over and above what we would expect.

It is shortly after this miracle in the Gospel of John that we hear Jesus say the words: “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35). Later in this scripture Jesus specifies how this moment is different than the miracle of the manna from heaven Jesus says:

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (John 6:51).

**In this moment, we experience a new kind of sustenance, the bread of life through Christ’s body.**

No longer do we ask God for bread either from heaven or the hands of Jesus, now our prayer becomes: “Give me Jesus.”

Jesus Christ is the one who sustains us as we wait for the fulfillment of Christ’s promise of resurrection through our faith in him.

In the meantime, we partake in the bread of Christ.

Each time we have communion we reread the Institution of the Lord’s Supper, the model given to us by Jesus, this sacrament of Holy Communion, where we remember Christ’s sacrifice on the cross and give thanks to God.

Through the communion liturgy we hear again the story of Scripture, God’s saving action on our lives, and Christ’s promise to return to save us.

In the meantime, in between the first and the last Sundays of the month, between the times we take communion and receive the bread of life, the symbol of Christ’s body, the presence of Christ revealed in the elements, we are not called to wait around for another miracle.

**We are called to be part of Christ’s sustaining ministry in the world every day through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.**

But there are things that distract us from this mission. When we live in the mindset of scarcity, we are unable to be part of Christ’s ministry of abundance.

We live in the mindset of scarcity when we feel like we do not have enough.

In his book, “The God We Can Know” Rob Fuquay names the things that get in the way of us emptying ourselves so that we can be more full of Christ.

Fuquay tells us we are full of “communications” and we are full of “stuff.”<sup>ii</sup>

Now more than ever we are inundated with communication. Whether it is from numerous news sources, the internet, or social media, it seems that all the time we are being bombarded with communications. Our culture applauds the way we can multi-task and communicate with so many different people, and yet in the act of multitasking are we really giving others the time and attention they deserve?

Fuquay names that we all have too much stuff. We all hold onto our material possessions, sometimes not really knowing why. Sometimes because they hold wonderful memories for us. But I think most of us would agree, we could do without many of our material possessions.

Fuquay shares with us that the people of Jesus society also felt the need to be full, the need to have all the things. Fuquay said: “That is the backstory to our Scripture today...

You think Jesus would be encouraged by thousands of people searching for him, but he knew why they came. They were just looking for another miracle... They had become consumers more than enjoyers.”<sup>iii</sup>

Sometimes this is how we treat our relationship with God something to be consumed and not enjoyed. And yet, the God of abundance, offers us not only enough, but more grace that we could ever need.

The question to God should be not what can you do for me God, but what I can do for you?

The founder of our denomination, John Wesley, was passionate about sharing Christ with others. He made a big impact in England, but he knew that God’s mission was bigger than that. So, he ordained two men to take the good news of Christ to America: Thomas Coke, and Francis Asbury. As they were leaving for America, he told them to “offer them Christ.”<sup>iv</sup>

When we offer people Christ, we show them that Christ is the only one who can fill us and quench our thirst. Christ is the only one who provides bread, his body, to offer us the means of grace. Christ is the only one who offers to us living water and saves us from our sin.

We participate in the will of God when we recognize that God is the primary actor of God’s will and we get to participate in it. Jesus knew this. In the garden right before his crucifixion he said, “Let not my will, but yours be done.”<sup>v</sup>

When we offer people Christ, we live in the kingdom of God now. I got a glimpse of this kingdom this past week at My Brother’s Table. A time where bread was broken, and the love of God was evident as everyone was offered an abundance of food.

I had the blessing to sit down with a man named Tim. We spent time reminiscing about food. He enjoyed the meal so much and said it reminded him of the Sunday afternoon meals he enjoyed with his family growing up in the south.

He shared with me every Sunday his family would catch up with each other, celebrate the joys that happened that week and pray for each other. These moments brought him great joy as he shared his memories with me.

His mother spent so much time fixing this meal and for him it became an embodiment of her love for her family.

Through the meal that we provided he felt that same love. That someone cared about him, that he could take refuge if only for a moment from the difficulties of life and be welcomed to the table.

It is in these moments that I am encouraged and given hope. In these moments I see that God is still raining down manna from heaven into our lives and offering us the bread of life.

We too are called to offer this bread to others, to participate in the joy of our faith.

During this season of Lent, I invite us to take these 40 days to repent and give thanks. We repent of all the times we have treated our relationship with God like consumers thinking that it is a one-way relationship.

We give thanks understanding that we participate in our relationship with God. Just as the young boy was an active participant in Christ’s miracle that day, we too offer ourselves so that others may be filled with the love of Jesus Christ.

**The good news for our lives today is that we have enough because God sustains us each and every day.**

May we be sustained today and every day by the bread of life. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

#### Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Rob Fuquay. “The God We Can Know.” Upper Room Books. Nashville, TN. 2014. P. 28.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid, P. 26.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid. P. 28-29.

<sup>iv</sup> <https://wesleyanrudy.com/2015/10/22/offer-them-christ/>

<sup>v</sup> Luke 22:42. NRSV.

#### **Additional Reference**

New Interpreter’s Biblical Commentary. Vol. 1. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 1994. P. 953.

New Interpreter’s Biblical Commentary. Vol. VIII. Abingdon Press. Nashville, TN. 1995.

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