

THE KID HAS GOT TWO AND A HALF SANDWICHES

John 6 1 – 21 July 26, 2009

Pilgrim Bud Precise

Our text for today from the Gospel of John is all over the place. There is the healing of multitudes. A boat ride across the Sea of Galilee. Mention of the celebration of the Passover in Jerusalem. The feeding of 5000. Someone wants to come and take Jesus by force and make him a King. And the text ends with Jesus wading on water. Really!! Where to begin? What is our focus?

We come to worship to hear words of comfort. Words of encouragement. Words of hope. Words of forgiveness. Words of judgement. All of those words we call words of grace. To me, our words of grace for today come from the story of the feeding of the crowd – about 5000 in all. It seems the crowd has followed Jesus to the other side of the Sea of Galilee because of his healing. They are tired and hungry and there is no food. Jesus asks Philip, “where are we going to buy bread for all these people?” We are not talking fast food, Milo’s, McDonalds, or Subway. Just some bread. Philip points out to Jesus that the problem is bigger than finding a thrift bread shop. “Six months wages would not buy enough bread for each person to have a little.” In other words, “Jesus, we don’t have the money to buy that much bread.” Another disciple, Andrew, says to Jesus, “There is a boy here with two and a half sandwiches, but that’s not going to be enough for this crowd.” Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” He takes the loaves and fish – he gives thanks – he breaks the bread and asks the disciples to distribute the food to the people. They gather twelve baskets of leftovers. I have had people, who don’t much believe in the Bible of miracle stories, ask me to explain this feeding of the 5000. I don’t know how to do that – explain the multiplication of the food. I have read that the people all had brought a little food, and that once the kid took out his lunch, others began to do the same. The miracle becomes the sharing of what little they had together. Is that a miracle? – or is that just an attempt to explain away the miracle? I don’t know. I do know that many times it seems a miracle to get folks to share what they have with others. I also know that people who do not have much seem willing to share readily what little they do have. Maybe it is because they know the predicament of being in need. Maybe they know the hopelessness of the one who is hungry, or cold, or without school supplies.

I love the story because the central character is a child. Maybe I am remembering words from Isaiah eleven, “and a little child shall lead them.” I do wish there were more stories in the Bible of Jesus as a child. Jesus does make the Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem with his parents at age 12. He gets into trouble because he got lost from the traveling group. But that’s it – the only story of Jesus as a child – except his birth story.

There are stories of other biblical heroes as children, and they tend to be some of my favorite bible stories. Moses. His mother floated him on the backwater of the Nile so the daughter of the pharaoh would find him. His mother did that to save his life as pharaoh had decreed that all male children would be killed. Another character central to that story is the older sister of Moses, Miriam, who, at the appropriate time, asks pharaoh’s daughter if she would like her to get a nurse from the Hebrew women for the child. Miriam had a major role in saving Moses. David. The shepherd boy who played the harp. David, who became King David – the greatest of all the kings of Israel. It was David as a youth, who was not afraid of the giant Goliath – and he defeated the giant with his sling shot.

I do remember at a busy time the disciples wanted to keep the children out of the way – away from bothering Jesus. Jesus used the occasion to teach that the trust of a child would get one into the Kingdom of God.

The kid has got two and a half sandwiches. What have you got in your backpack, in your hand, in your head? Ken Forbes wanted to learn. He wanted to know about liberal Christianity. He began a group SPAFER – that not only helped him learn, it has reached out to hundreds of people in our city who want and need to understand God and who we are in a different light than a conservative, biblical literalist point of view. His group has brought some of the leading scholars – Borg, Spong, Crossan, and many others to lecture in Birmingham. Maybe what you have is that book you have wanted to write. What have you got to share with others who are in need?

In 1860, Grace Bedell, an 11 year old from Westfield, NY, wrote a letter to Abraham Lincoln. She told him that his face was too thin and that he would look much better with a beard. “All the ladies (remember this is before women could vote) – all the ladies like whiskers and they would tease their husbands to vote for you.” Lincoln started the beard and by the time he was elected, it was and remains in statues, on the 5 dollar bill, and on classroom walls in schools all over the country. It became “The Lincoln Look.” On February 10, 1861, Lincoln was traveling through Westfield to Washington to be inaugurated. He wanted to meet one person. “I know that there is a young lady from Westfield who wrote me a letter and would she by chance be in this crowd.” Grace Bedell was found and brought forward. Lincoln stepped from the train, shook her hand, kissed her and asked how she liked the improvement she had asked him to make.

Girl Scout Brownie Troop 7201 of Bedford, Mass has erected a Peace Pole. It is 4 X 4 and 60.6 inches tall. It will be dedicated on September 21 – International Day of Peace. The inscription of the Peace Pole reads, “May Peace Prevail ON Earth.”

The kid didn’t have much – just two and a half sandwiches. He shared it.

The word of grace from our text today calls us to see what we have to offer. Sometimes it may be our lunch. Sometimes it may be our words of understanding. Sometimes it may be our act of forgiveness, our words for inclusion, our stand for peace. The text is a reminder that God can take what we have to offer and multiply it. What we have to offer is much more than we think when we offer it in the name of Christ.

I think of Pilgrim today. We have just finished interviewing candidates to be full time as a pastor here at Pilgrim. What do we have to offer to Christ? What do we have to offer our community in the name of Christ? I know we are not many. I also know that is not the most important thing. We have a spirit of openness and acceptance that is important to offer. We have the courage to welcome everyone – race, gender, sexual orientation, rich, poor, old, young – we have that understanding that everyone belongs in this community of faith. We are generous as we offer our food, our service our witness to the poor and homeless of our city. Let us, like the boy in our story offer what we have. I believe God will not only accept it, God will multiply it in the lives of others.