

## Hunger and Hospitality

[Isaiah 55:1-5](#)

[Psalm 145: 8-9, 15-22](#)

[Romans 9:1-5](#)

[Matthew 14:13-21](#)

One of the many things I miss during this time in exile is potlucks! Potlucks do have some downsides – like not knowing what you are eating, eating too much and filling up with carbs. All that delicious pasta, rice and beans are not so good for those of us who are diabetic or nearly so. But I love having other people cook for me; I love knowing you all through your cooking; I love the piled plates and happy conversation.

Today's story of the 5,000 men plus women and children who got fed in the deserted place might be seen as the institution of the great Christian tradition of covered dish, or potluck meals. But apparently only one person brought something. Yet after Jesus had blessed it, there was enough. There was enough for everyone and more left over – 12 baskets; one for each of the tribes of Israel.

The gospel writers leave us in no doubt that this was a very important event in their understanding of Jesus. It is, I think, the only miracle which appears in all four gospels. And both Mark and Matthew record two similar miracles -one with five thousand and one with four thousand people. So this morning I want to reflect with you on what it is that makes this miracle so special, so very central to the story of Jesus' life and teaching.

But first a quick side trip. In the last century there have been those who have sought to take the supernatural out of the miraculous and come up with logical explanations for the miracles. I don't care for that because I reckon that Jesus was God as much as human and could use his God powers when appropriate like when healing the sick or feeding the hungry and not inappropriately like jumping off the top of the temple into the arms of the angels or similar publicity stunts. But those who argue against Jesus having blessed the fish and bread and it multiplying to feed a big crowd say that probably other people had also brought picnics with them and the miracle was that they shared with one another and found that no-one went hungry.

Whether it is a miracle of divine hospitality or of human hospitality, the feeding of the five thousand-plus sticks in our minds and engages our hearts. It encapsulates who Jesus is. It symbolizes in a dramatic way the hospitality of God.

These people had followed Jesus and we are told that he had compassion on them so he healed the sick and then when his disciples pointed out to him that the crowd was hungry he said, "You give them something to eat." You give them something to eat. And his disciples have been doing that ever since. That is why the people of St Ben's gave lunch to 74 people yesterday at 40 Prado; it is why we were the first group to volunteer to cook food for the Los Osos Cares Community Dinners, and why next month we will once again provide a delicious dinner for our neighbors; it is why Maureen and Barbara Skipper show up every week as part of the serving team. Food matters. Jesus has compassion and so do his disciples.

But in our spiritual tradition food is more than the physical food, however delicious. Look at the first reading this morning from Isaiah 55.

Thus says the Lord:

"Ho, everyone who thirsts,  
come to the waters;

and you that have no money,  
come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk  
without money and without price.

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,  
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,  
and delight yourselves in rich food.

The food that God is offering God's people is rich and satisfies. It is the food and drink of spiritual nourishment, the gift of God's love and God's presence.

After fasting for forty days and nights at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus was famished and the devil came to him and offered him food, but Jesus said, no "'It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matt 4:4). And later, when he was sitting by the well with the Samaritan woman, his disciples came back from the nearby village where they had gone for supplies and Jesus said, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.'" (John 4:31-34)

We know that Jesus loved to eat. So much so that he was criticized for his eating and drinking. Jesus would have loved potlucks. But what he loved even more was the word of God and living the reign of God in his ministry.

And he described himself as the Bread of Life.

Jesus is the bread which is broken for us – for our sustenance and we are the Body of Christ so we too are the bread which is broken for the life of the world. We participate in the astonishing and never-ending hospitality of God as we come to God for spiritual food. And in turn we can offer hospitality to our friends and neighbors. Hospitality means sharing ourselves and our lives; it is not limited to the kind of physical hospitality that we are unable to offer safely at present. Hospitality in these times is a friendly wave, a phone call, a card, a prayer.

Hospitality is sharing ourselves in a Zoom call or on Facebook. Hospitality is listening to the Holy Spirit, feeding on God and then shining that sustenance out to others. We share the food of God when we refuse to get caught up in complaining and divisive talk; we share the food of God

when we respond with loving gentleness and when we reach out with hope; we share the food of God when we stand up for justice and work for the health of the planet.

The world is hungry for wisdom, the world is hungry for hope, the world is hungry for grace. And so are we.

Today's gospel shows us that the little we have is enough once it is given to God, blessed and shared. The little we have is made into abundance, into a feast for everyone. God's hospitality embraces us and even in these strange times, we can find ways to share that hospitality.

When the people of Israel were given manna, if they hoarded it, it went bad, so also if we try to hoard the love of God for ourselves it fails. God's love is intended to be shared. God's love grows and multiplies when it is freely shared.

The miracle of God's abundant hospitality happens when we take out our sandwiches and share them; when we take out our few glimmers of hope and share them; when we take out our gratitude and share it; when we start every day asking "God, show me how to share your love today."

It was in the breaking of the bread that the despondent disciples on the road to Emmaus recognized the stranger who accompanied them. They didn't get to eat with him because as soon as they recognized the truth, Jesus disappeared. Like them, we cannot literally break bread together with Jesus whether in a potluck or a Eucharist.

But we can, whatever road we are travelling, break the bread of God's word, of God's will and of God's grace. We can share God's love and hospitality. We can, and we must.

The world depends on it.