

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

We are not going to read the gospel more than once. It is relatively well known to us. So now, during the sermon, you and I should both expect God to help us develop an understanding for our time through the roadmap and example of scripture.

Remember last week's reading? The apostles came back to Jesus after going out among the people, and they were exhausted. Jesus and apostles got into a boat to get away for some rest, but they were somehow followed to the place where they landed. These followers are people who have NO leisure time, living literally from hand to mouth. But they MADE the time to chase after Jesus and his followers. And, again...why?

Because the apostles, while out on the road and doing deeds, speak about God. Calmly. Confidently. Without judgment, or declarations of worthiness or sinfulness. They shared the joy of how they felt blessed in life. How thankful they were. So freely. So matter of factly. And back it up with acts in faith. As if they themselves had lost their fear and hesitation to talk openly about God. Willing to ask questions...to bravely consider all of it.

Well, that was last week's gospel reading. And this week? The crowd catches up with Jesus and his followers. They are persistent, for sure, going up that mountain. And then what?

What indeed.

We, in this time and place, normally get all bogged down in this story with the detail of the five loaves and two fish. Who knew that five simple loaves of bread, and two pieces of fish would cause such a huge, outburst of a struggle some 2,000 years later?

This story of bread and fish has become a lightning rod in the scientific, rational thought age. On the one side, you have the anti-theists, the God deniers, or at least the "I'm from Missouri, so show me" types, who immediately discount this story of the five loaves and two fish now feeding more than five thousand people as sheer fantasy. And many of the folks in the pews, agree in saying, "Ha...that could not happen.", we say, in our 21st century realism.

And on the other side, are the strong believers in Jesus as the miracle worker...reflecting so many other stories in the Gospel of superhuman feats. Actions that defy logical, medical or rational explanation, given our understanding of the world...and why not? Because these actions, these miracles performed by Jesus are not of this world, even when they occur within it.

Talk about the classic battle when it comes to a theological tug of war.

God hits us with this gospel story because of an unbelievable miracle? Unbelievable for us because the miracle is for God to do. Not Jesus. Not you or me. If that is the case, then how does God do it? How does God take five loaves and two fish and get everyone fed, so that there is even more left over? Was there more than the recorded starting amount?

Well, I think the accent is on the wrong syllable, so to speak. Whichever side of this rope that

you pull in this tug of war, you might want.....maybe want....to consider a different take.

No, the real reason for this gospel message for today is higher up on the page.

“Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do.”

Philip the apostle did what? Literally. Pull out your reading insert, and look at verse 7 of the gospel. What is the verb? What did Philip do?

Answered him. The action of talk, right?

Saying to Jesus essentially, “Well, Jesus...Here is the problem. Here is why it will not work. Here is my attitude: It does not matter whatever you put before me as a focus of what needs to get done, I will **tell** you my concerns, my fears, as to why I think it is unworkable..too costly, too hard, too long, too strenuous, too uncertain.”

Next, it was Andrew’s turn to pile on. And he what? Literally? What is the verb in verse 8?

He **“SAID”** to him. More talk, all while 5,000 are hungry, sitting around, looking for help. All the time, more talk. Sounds like the Church, all right. Andrew says, essentially, “Well, Jesus...this boy is here but with limited resources. Way too limited. **BUT** what are they among so many people?” But...but...but...

Look further. What are the verbs describing Jesus? In verse 11 alone? **“TOOK** the loaves”. **“had GIVEN** thanks”. **“DISTRIBUTED** them to those who were seated.”

This scripture...and his life...continue to try to teach us.

Talk is cheap. Talk is nothing more than cheap rationalization that we use to justify our own fears. Our laziness. Our complacency. Our desire to leave things alone as they are, including leave me alone. Do not bother me with change, or challenges.

It is maddening. One the one hand, we have almost unlimited fear of trusting in ourselves alone, and on the other hand, we cannot give up our losing control in case someone else proves we were cowards all along. It is the fear that comes from not having faith in God. Look at the end...they were terrified, but he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.”

So what if he has only five loaves and two fish in his hands? Forget about talk. He moves ahead. “This is what you have given me, Father, and I give you thanks for it. Now, be with me as I move ahead, and give to others in your name.” That is what Jesus does. Not talk. He acts. He moves.

And what was up with those five thousand? Why did they come?? To hear the mass sung? To hear the organ? Was it for coffee hour? They chased after Jesus and his followers, up the mountain...to gather, and sit down in a place of peace, of hope, of positive life, of healing, of forgiveness. In the cosmic explanation for their coming, they come, driven by their innate souls, to...get fed!

We look at the loaves and fishes in terms of food. Maybe, just maybe, the actual miracle was the people’s response to his prayer of thanksgiving, and that they...all of the sudden...started sharing

what they had brought along for themselves. And now, there is enough food for 5,000 plus, which is the real, and I mean REAL miracle that everyone in today's world can get on board with.

But, if these folks had edible food with them, they came to get fed another way...to hear and feel the witness of stories about God. Sure, maybe we are relatively old, and frail, and all that. I have some life in me yet, and I am looking at this parish to find others with a spirit of action...not excuses. People will always come...always...to hear about God.

You...the parish...are challenged by myself, and by the diocese, to re-engage and refocus on whatever we collectively discern that God calls the people of this parish to do. Not to say, bu to Do.

We need to engage our own parish community, as we have plenty, plenty of people here who need some feeding....feeding in terms of being called upon in times of physical healing, or reaching out to those with developing frailties of body and spirit. Those who are named in our prayer list or, more generally in our prayers, those who are in any form of adversity.

We need to engage our community's youth and their culture on their terms, and on their schedule. In my mind, that means risk-taking. Planning for real action. A dedicated commitment to a hard-set schedule of interests and activities that we can only begin to imagine.

Like Jesus, can you see the need...the crowd coming up the mountain? How do we address it? Worry, and complain, and second guess, and argue, and talk or whisper about how we have no money, no resources, and/or are not young and healthy enough.

Or....do we give thanks to God for the challenges that are before us, the chance to get busy and engage even more with the hungry in our midst, and let God work the miracles of answering their..and our prayers?

We need to focus on our gifts. To plan actively for the unique form of Christian evangelism that is not fundamentally judgmental of society and the world around us...the relatively quiet, respectful, understated Episcopal way. But instead, by sharing our stories of God, our way of telling our stories of being loved and touched by God lets others know our basic belief: that everyone is a child of God, and that in relationship we start from there.

We need to focus our creativity. On our relative civility. God gave each of us an imagination. In God's name, it is time to use it.

Like Philip, and Simon Peter the apostles...we need to drop our doubts, our fears, our sense of failure and limitation, our "but...but...butts" along the side of the road, and get moving. Instead of crying over a dissipated church, we MUST look at the blessing given by God to us...a chance to remake our formation process into one that engages this people and this time.

Our prayer is that God give this parish, these people, the vision, and the courage, and the faith to move ahead...keeping their actions in step with Jesus, whose firm faithfulness in the Father's goodness and mercy continues to lead us, all as we follow and worship you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.