

July 26 2015

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalms 145:8-18, p. 569

Ephesians 3:14-21, p. 1067

John 6:1-14, 53-58, p. 973

Sermon *Bread From Heaven*

My great grandfather's parents came from French Canada around the Cape Horn and settled in Grass Valley, California in 1850. My great grandfather was born shortly after they arrived and was raised in a Roman Catholic orphan's home after both of his parents died. When he was old enough he moved into what was then Washington Territory to make his fortune. He raised sheep. He traded with the Native Americans. He ran a fruit orchard, and with great grandmother, he raised 12 children. He came from hardy pioneer stock and lived to over 90 years old and outlived great grandmother by over 30 years, probably because she was the one that had to give birth to the children and not him. Being a healthy man until later in life great grandpa liked to eat, and when the family went camping it was a long standing custom in the family that they would camp as family units with each taking care of his own cooking. I think that is the safest way. As a widower, great grandpa played this for all it was worth, going from one camp to another for breakfast, having cereal and toast in one camp, pancakes and sausages in another camp, bacon and eggs in one more camp until he would have four or five different breakfasts during the course of each day. Finally, one morning my grandfather, his son, came out and asked his father, "Do you think you got enough to eat this morning?" As his eyes twinkled all great grandpa would say, "You, know son, you eat pretty light on this trip."

It seems that Jesus got gotten himself into quite a predicament with food in today's gospel lesson as well. 5000 men plus women and children; lonely place removed from the towns and highway, all with physical hunger because the people had not eaten and apparently few, if any, had packed a sack lunch or picnic basket that day. The disciples, with just five loaves and two fish, and as you notice, they had an attitude problem as well. "This isn't going to feed five thousand people, God." The people's homes are far away, no place close to get food or not enough money in the coffers to buy food even if there were places to buy it.

Anyway, one small child came up with enough food to feed over 5,000 people at the spur of the moment. It was a bleak picture. You know Jesus' miracle eliminated that bleak picture in a pretty speculator way with more food left over after all had eaten their fill than had been there to start with. You get the impression from the gospels, that Jesus' miracle was pretty serious and pretty sober

matter indeed. John's Gospel uses this miracle as the jumping off point for a rather lengthy discourse about Jesus as the bread which came down from Heaven. The point that being our relationship with Jesus is to be continually, it is to be intimate and ultimately satisfying in our lives of faith.

I wonder though if there might have been another aspect of that miracle besides what we demonstrated with the boys and girl; an aspect which the gospels don't really report, which might give another slant to the whole event without eliminating the seriousness of that event.

The other aspect is the reaction of the people that Jesus performed. I want you to put your imagination cap on for just a minute, and put yourself into that group of over 5,000 people who had been hungry but were now miraculously provided with food. Can you imagine yourself and others sitting on that hillside in silence with long serious looks on your faces? I can't, I bet they didn't either because Jesus had just turned a very serious situation into a picnic with all the fishwiches that you could possibly eat in your life. We need to give a pretty sober and serious cast to events of Jesus' life and to the people who followed Jesus. On the one hand, it was proper, it was understandable, because it was serious and weighty things stood at the center of all the things that Jesus stood for, his teachings, his miracles, and his crucifixion and weighty matters all of them. And yet one should not conclude from that there wasn't a light hearted, happy, laughter filled time in Jesus' life and the responses of those who were the recipients of his ministry and who eventually became Jesus' disciples. I can't imagine for example that Jesus, who brought so much joy and hope into people's lives, the same Jesus, in whom little children were attracted, had a long faced and was sad bad looking person who seldom smiled, seldom laughed. I can't imagine that there weren't moments of light hearted laughter, joking as Jesus walked the roads and streets of Palestine with that bunch of fishermen who were a kind of ragtag bunch to start with. Jesus' mission was serious to be sure, but its purpose was a joyful purpose. The purpose was to break down the walls between human beings and their God and break down the walls between us and our fellow human beings; to show God's love by eliminating suffering and those who can't stand by themselves, to show others that life in this world that we live, that God has given to us is a gift; a gift to be joyously celebrating together. Jesus' mission was serious but its purpose was joyful.

Our faith in Jesus does deal with serious matters, life and death matters as did the life of Jesus and those serious matters should not be neglected or should be taken lightly but neither should they keep us from remembering Jesus brought love, hope, joy, and happiness into the people's lives and that he participated right in the midst of that joy. He gave the people, and each one of us, something to shout about, smile about, to laugh about, out of sheer joy, out of sheer gratitude for God's blessing. We need to take care that we do not make our Christian faith such

a serious matter, of obligation, of drudgery that we never really experience the joy that Jesus brought today our lives, the gift of love and forgiveness and victory over death. Jesus stands with us during trials, but Jesus laughs with us in times of rejoicing. And that joyous aspect will be easier to remember if we remember that the same Jesus who suffered, died on the cross and conquered death, is the same Jesus that smiled and laughed with his disciples and with little boys and girls, the same Jesus who one day threw a picnic lunch on a grassy hillside with a bunch of hungry people who came to hear him preach.

I encourage you today then as you grow in your faith day by day to remember that the joy of your experience as a follower of Jesus is not a fleeting joy; is not a transitory joy; like the joy that my great grandfather enjoyed in the meals that he would eat on his camping trip.

Now Jesus said, "This is the bread that came down from heaven not such as the fathers ate and then died but the one who eats this bread will live forever." And together we say AMEN