

Proper 13, Year A
Matthew 14: 13-21

Miracles – My father took some time in my Christian education explaining biblical miracles. The feeding of five-thousand men was one of them. He said that people carried food with them when they left home and this was a miracle of sharing. Everyone shared their food. That didn't sound miraculous to me. Dad explained that not only the event is important but the who, where, when and why of the event.

Several years ago, a friend and I went to see a Neil Diamond Concert at the Excel Center in Minneapolis. It was surprising to me to discover that there were over seventeen thousand people at the concert. I have lived in a big city and never thought about how many people were around me. Neil Diamond is a charismatic person when music is involved and got people to stand up and sing together, wave their arms and dance in the aisles. It was fun to be there.

Jesus, who was trying to get away from a crowd, found himself surrounded by the crowd who had followed on foot. There were about five thousand men, not counting the women and children who were also there. Say that each man had a wife and a child with him. That would mean that there were at least fifteen thousand people present. There were enough to make a crowd at the Excel Center. There were no microphones, no spotlights, no food vendors, and no one was selling books to commemorate the

event. People lived in crowded towns. (In my experience this tends to make people distrustful of strangers and a bit grumpy, as well.) Now it is getting late. People are hungry. Jesus has been feeding their souls, but bodily needs are kicking in. This is the place where the miracle occurs. He tells his disciples to feed the crowd. They are dumbstruck. They offer him what they have. He thanks God for the five loaves and two fish, and blesses them. Then they are distributed among the crowd. The crowd sees Jesus' words in action. They see the stewardship of the disciples offering what they have. They see Jesus receive the gift, give thanks to God, and bless the food. (Blessing the food and thanking God would have been a part of Jewish ritual at the time.) Then they saw that all were welcome to share, stranger and friend alike. The crowd, moved by what they had heard and seen, responded by acting similarly.

What motivated this event? Why didn't Jesus just leave, get away? Scripture tells us that "When he saw the crowds, he was moved with compassion for them to the depths of his being." God's compassion and the action of his disciples produced enough action to feed upwards of fifteen thousand people.

I have heard Anne Rich and Joe Graca, our stewardship chairpersons, use this quote, "God and I can do infinitely more than I can do by myself. This sounds like exactly what happened in this feeding story. The fish and loaves were multiplied, not by one or two times their amount, but by thousands of times the original amount. The feeding

was abundant and there were baskets of leftovers as well. They were satisfied. They had plenty. None had too much or too little.

This fall the Church in Minnesota will be collecting gently used shoes to be distributed all over the world to the more than three hundred million children who have no shoes. Each church has been given a collection box and the boxes will be gathered at the Diocesan Convention in October. I suggest to you, that our sharing out the abundance, which God has given us, can reduce this need in the world and improve the lives of children around the globe.

It is like the story of the man who sees a boy on a beach, in the early morning, throwing starfish back into the sea. He asks the boy what he is doing. The boy says that the starfish will die, if they are left on the beach. The man, looking down the beach at hundreds of starfish, says “But there are so many. What difference can it make?” The boy looking at the starfish in his hand replies, “It makes a difference to this one.” What difference can five loaves and two fish make to fifteen thousand?

There are millions for whom our action can make a difference. The action is simple, give from our abundance to God. Give thanks for the abundance. Ask a blessing on the gift and watch what God can do with our version of fishes and loaves.