

26th July 2009 B

Apart from the resurrection, this miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand alone enthuses all of the gospel writers to record it. An exciting missionary adventure is ruined by John the Baptist's death, and Jesus and his disciples retire across the lake of Galilee. It was the backdrop for an incredibly timeless human story. Of all the gospel writers, only John writes, "He knew what he was going to do" (John 6:6). Other translations say it, Christ "already had in mind what he was going to do." The disciples, even though they had witnessed many miracles, were frustrated for they did not know what the Jesus "had in mind to do." Life is full of demands for which our resources seem inadequate. According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the disciples would have sent the people away hungry. Jesus, however, lived his life by another principle: "Anyone who comes to me," he says, "I will never drive away" (John 6:37). Still, just like the disciples, we often are tempted to say, "Send them away. They're too much trouble." Is this not sometimes our first response to a situation that we cannot deal with easily? Is that not sometimes how we think when we encounter someone we deem an undesirable? As a result, we miss opportunities to be a part of something new or something that has the potential to stretch us. As an old saying goes,

Everybody says, "Let Somebody do it."

Somebody says, "Let Anybody do it."

And, when Anybody doesn't do it,

Nobody does it!

So, Christ's kingdom work falters for lack of willing servants and "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few" (Luke 10:2). Why? Well, it is often because we are not willing to offer ourselves, so we send the multitudes away. When we complain, it often is a form of running from something we consider inconvenient because we have closed our mind and heart to the possibility that God through Jesus "already has in mind."

Others wish themselves away as did King David when forsaken by a fair-weather friend: "Oh, that I could fly away" he cried (cf. Psalm 55:6). Jeremiah's congregation nearly drove him crazy and he cried out, "I wish I could get away from them" (cf. Jeremiah 9:2). In our Gospel the disciples complained because the large crowd was an inconvenience by their estimation. Philip, according to the Gospel, griped, "six months wages" would not be enough to feed the crowd. Philip's was the stunted faith of the bottom line that will forever come up short. We see it in various forms. People who measure life by the horizons of their own limited capacity to think. In looking at their own thoughts, they miss the possibility of what Jesus "has in mind." How often has renewal faltered because Christians wilt rather than stand for the faith we claim to hold so dear? In short, we are often our own biggest enemy. We tend to run from opportunities and blame it on others. If we are not careful, we become prisoners of our own finite imaginations but here is the eternal and unchangeable truth: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah

55:8-9) David and Jeremiah stayed and the world has seen what God “already had in mind.” So, let us turn our equation around and examine the things Christ had in mind.

Andrew is a bringer. He brought people to Christ. The most famous, of course, was Andrew’s brother Peter. I doubt that Andrew had any idea the day he introduced Peter to Jesus what the Lord might do with Andrew’s big brother. But, Jesus knew what was to happen. Jesus “already had in mind” some things for Peter. Jesus knew everything there was about Peter. He could see past the denials near Calvary to the power of Pentecost when Peter would preach and thousands would be converted. It would not have been that way without Andrew. While the other disciples complained about the high cost of groceries, Andrew brought a boy’s lunch. It was not much, but it was what he had. Bringers do the best they can with what is at hand rather than complain. I would rather bring than complain any day, wouldn’t you? When Andrew brought that boy’s lunch, no doubt a typical boy’s lunch for that time and place, composed of five barley loaves and two small fish — Jesus went to work. We never know what Jesus has in mind until we bring him something or someone.

Or, think about Calvary’s cross. To the enemies of Christ, it looked as though the cross was the end of their problems with him. To Christ’s friends, it seemed that their leader was gone for good and everything they had done over the last three years had come to nothing. However, for God, that cross was merely a prelude to a glorious new era in which the whole world would learn that death is not the last thing but the first bright morning of the new eternal day in glory. None of them could see that Friday on Calvary that, beyond the veil which we in our ignorance call death, there is a glorious new life that will never pass away. God knew what he planned to do and he turned that rough Roman symbol of suffering and death into the world’s ultimate plus sign. When they looked at the hungry multitude the disciples concluded, “Impossible and too costly!” Had they looked first at the Saviour, however, they would have discovered that what they thought impossible was imminently possible. Nothing is impossible to him. He says, if we have faith as small as a mustard seed, we will discover that nothing is impossible to us either (Matthew 17:20).

The disciples discovered there on a Galilean hillside that the Lord always has a positive, constructive plan in mind whether it is for the seemingly inconsequential or the eternally significant. By their reckoning, feeding thousands looked like a hopeless thing. Had their way of thinking prevailed, the crowd would have dissipated and the church’s missionary march might well have ended that day. By Christ’s plan, that crowd would be nourished both in body and in spirit. I believe that today, through this word, Jesus says to you and to me, “Work with me and your mountains will be moved and the bad things, even death itself, will always get better. Work with me and your needs will be met. Work with me and nothing shall be impossible to you.” It all begins when we bring Christ all we have. He will take our failures and insufficiency and turn it into something good. He will multiply what seems not enough. “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit” (John 15:5). Does something in your life seem to hold no hope? Do your resources seem too small? Have you considered “the things Christ has in mind”?