

Thomas R. Cook
St. Stephen's Church – Edina, Minnesota
8:00 and 10:00 a.m. Celebrations of the Holy Eucharist
The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost; July 29, 2018

“Rooted and Grounded”

Scripture: Mark 6:1-21; Ephesians 3:14-21 10 Pentecost B (Proper 12B RCL)

So, Jesus sees the crowd of thousands headed his way, and he asks a pretty simple question: “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” But I have a question too... *Why* did Jesus feel like he needed to feed all those people in the first place? It's not like he invited them over to his home for dinner that afternoon. It's not like he sent out an invitation to come to a picnic he was throwing near the Sea of Galilee. He made no promises, accepted no obligations for anyone's well-being. And I'm sure all those people didn't get up that morning expecting that somebody else would make lunch for them just because they were out wandering around the countryside. I mean... why feed them at all? Why feel such a responsibility or even consider such an impossible undertaking? Isn't it enough that Jesus is teaching and healing and doing all those important messiah sorts of things already?

Well, as Mahatma Gandhi would say nearly two thousand years after this holy picnic near the Sea: “To the millions who go without [even] two meals a day, the only

form in which God dare appear... is food.”¹

See, I think Jesus is nothing if not shrewd, nothing if not smart and, most important of all, nothing if not... caring. I’m struck by how much Jesus pays attention to those with whom he... is. It’s a pretty simple and practical sort of life he lives. When people are sick, he does his best to heal them. When they are tired, he invites them to rest. When they are lonely or neglected, he listens to them. When they are heart-broken, he comforts and reassures them. When they lack understanding, he teaches them. And when they are hungry, well... he thinks about feeding them. *“Where are we to buy bread for [all] these people to eat?”* **[Ponder...]** It’s as if his whole person is given over at some level to responding in helpful, hopeful ways to others around him. Hmmm... that’s weird. Unless, of course, you’ve paid any attention at all to something of what God has been trying to say to us for millennia. Like... “Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18).” Or like the way God asks the Hebrew people to leave the edges of their fields un-harvested, so those without enough food can take what they need (Leviticus 19). Or when God invites the people to share their bread with the hungry, or open their homes to the homeless poor, or to clothe those who have no clothes, or to undo injustice (Isaiah 58). Or when God reminds us to “...love the stranger” (that is... the alien, the immigrant) in the land,

¹ From Synthesis for July 22, 2018.

because even God's people were once strangers in the land of Egypt (Deuteronomy 10). All of our ancestors wandered from somewhere to get where we are today.

It's no surprise that Jesus is thinking about feeding the people. His whole approach to us, his concern for our well-being, his desire to feed us who gather around him... none of that should really come as any surprise. He's actually just living out what God has been intending since the beginning. But maybe it's a little harder to perceive than I think, a little harder to understand than I make it sound. The world surely doesn't always live into such a vision of mutual support and care for each other and for the Creation. Not everyone has had the experience of love in their lives that I have had or, perhaps, you have had. Not everyone knows something of the life of Jesus. They've never had anyone share these stories with them or show them what they mean or treat them like Jesus asked us to treat them. It's sort of like *we have to know something beyond knowledge, to comprehend something greater than our comprehension. We have to feel something in our inner being that isn't always so visible on the outside.*

Wait a minute. I've heard something like this before. This morning. In the letter to the Ephesians... "I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit..." I pray that "... you know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge..."

Why does Jesus feel the need to feed all those people who come to him? Because he is working from a knowledge that is beyond just knowing, he is responding to a power within him more powerful than all the forces of politics and economy and government and selfishness. He already *is* something we are continually seeking to be. And the writer of the letter to the Ephesians spills the beans... Jesus is rooted and grounded in love. And I would like to believe that the reason we are here together on this Sunday morning is because... we are, as the letter to the Ephesians says, being rooted and grounded in love. Just like Jesus. And when we are rooted and grounded in love, looking out for others is no surprise, it's no chore, it's no magic, though it may well be miraculous... like feeding so many with so little. But I would always encourage us to give such miracles a try...

Parker Palmer tells the story of at time he boarded an airplane that was delayed at the gate early one morning, because they were awaiting the delivery of coffee and snacks for the flight. And after waiting a time, the pilot made the decision to depart to keep things on schedule. And as they were taxiing to the runway, the inevitable griping and grouching started up. *What do you mean no coffee? What do mean no snacks? How are we to do this flight like that?* So the attendant got on the PA and said, "Hey, maybe this isn't a great situation, but we've got each other. Now... take out those snacks you brought on board with you anyway. Empty your pockets of the peanuts and pretzels and gum you saved from your last flight. Open them up and pass them

around. We've got cups, if you've brought water or soft drinks. Why not share? Give a section of your morning paper to somebody near you. In fact, bring out those pictures of your kids and grandkids and show them to others. Why not be cordial and talk a little with each other this morning for a change?" And to Palmer's surprise, people did it. They passed around what they brought to eat or drink. They conversed. And the mood lightened and the flight passed, and everyone made it just fine. And as they approached their destination, Palmer spoke to the flight attendant who had so boldly asked people to act in such an unusual and unselfish way. He said, "That was tremendous. How did you know to do that?" And he said the flight attendant leaned over and spoke softly in his ear and said, "The [miracle of] the loaves and fishes is not dead."²

What I hope we do every time we go out into the world from this place is...
prove it!

² Adapted from Synthesis for July 29, 2018.