

Scripture Reading:

Luke 9:7 “7 Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by [Jesus]; and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead, 8 and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the old prophets had risen again. 9 Herod said, "John I have beheaded, but who is this of whom I hear such things?"

So he sought to see Him.

10 And the apostles, when they had returned, told Him all that they had done. Then He took them and went aside privately into a deserted place belonging to the city called Bethsaida.

11 But when the multitudes knew it, they followed Him; and He received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who had need of healing.

12 When the day began to wear away, the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the multitude away, that they may go into the surrounding towns and country, and lodge and get provisions; for we are in a deserted place here."

13 But He said to them, "You give them something to eat." And they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless we go and buy food for all these people."

14 For there were about five thousand men. Then He said to His disciples, "Make them sit down in groups of fifty." 15 And they did so, and made them all sit down. 16 Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the multitude. 17 So they all ate and were filled, and twelve baskets of the leftover fragments were taken up by them.”

Bread & Circuses

After hearing the passage this morning some might be wondering about my sermon title: **Bread & Circuses...** The bread part certainly jumps out of this account, but where did I come up with the circus??

As we approach this passage from the Gospel of Luke I want us to reflect on a couple of images from history: One is the Bible's account of God's people making the long journey through the wilderness, being feed everyday by the manna that appeared each morning: The Bible refers to it as "the bread of heaven" The other is the Roman Coliseum near the end of their "glorious" worldly empire where entertainment and food were used to pacify a restless people: This was referred to as giving them **Bread & Circuses!**

These two contrasting images are helpful as they reflect the two reactions we see in the Gospels to the works of Jesus:

- One group, clearly represented by King Herod, came looking for the show or the feast
- The other, represented by the Disciples, saw Jesus bringing the bread of life as fully explained in John's account of this miracle in the 6th chapter of his Gospel!

King Herod and many of those in the crowds were not learning the proper lessons and we do **NOT** want to make the same mistakes when Jesus comes to us as the bread of life and with daily bread for life!

Luke does not want us to miss the contrast between those who are coming to Christ in faith and those who are coming for the show as we discussed when John the Baptist sent his questions to Jesus in Chapter 7

- We see this contrast with **BOTH** King Herod and many in the crowds who followed Jesus.
- I believe this is why Luke includes these verses about Herod here in his orderly account!

Luke brings us back to King Herod after Jesus has been betrayed when Pilate discovers He was from Galilee:

Attempting to pass the buck, the Roman Governor sends Jesus to King Herod who is glad to receive Him for all the wrong reasons:

Luke 23:8 "Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him."

So Luke clearly shows that King Herod is not under any conviction that would lead to repentance:

- **King Herod was hearing the same accounts about “the Jesus Show” from the crowds that caused John to ask questions**
- **King Herod waited a “long time” to have the chance to bring Jesus into his royal court for a real show!**

King Herod was deeply disappointed He was NOT seeking Jesus in Faith!

- **God’s people meet the Savior in the wilderness of sin needing to repent, not in the royal courts wanting to be entertained**
- **I will leave it to you to properly ponder the much needed applications from these texts for the American Church scene in the 21st Century!**

There are also problems with the crowds which John fully explains: After these crowds followed Jesus back to the other side of the sea: Jesus confronts them in John 6:26, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs [*His healing, teaching and miracle*], but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. 27 Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him."

Jesus offers the Bread of Life... -- The people wanted full stomachs

Jesus spoke the Words of life... -- Many saw them as ‘hard things’

Jesus shows He is the Lord creation... -- King Herod and many others are looking for a worldly circus act

Jesus had taken His disciples to the wilderness for rest and instruction... -- Many longed for the King’s Court

- **Your homework is to study John Chapter six and see the full impact of all these contrasts**

Our main task this morning is to look carefully at what happened this day and to learn some important lessons as those who do seek Jesus as the Bread of Life!

- **The miracle before us is the feeding of the five thousand:**

Certainly one of the most famous of the New Testament accounts, but many simply refuse to accept that it is plainly presented as a miracle:

- **It gives “moral” lessons, like the boy giving up his lunch for others, but NO reasonable person would actually believe that Jesus feed five thousand people with food that He created on the spot!**
- **There must be a “logical” explanation for what they see as His circus trick or magic act!**

But we must see that this miracle IS the central point of one of the few events that is recorded for us in ALL four Gospels!

- **The majesty & impact of this miracle, where we again see Jesus as the Lord of Creation, cannot be missed with any honest reading of the text!**

The first thing we should notice is that this ministry to the crowds & miracle was a 'distraction' for Jesus!

He had moved away from the cities and crowds to give his disciples some rest from their labors, to let them give their reports AND for Him to have a time of solitude & prayer, having just heard about the cruel death of John the Baptist. However, the crowds follow: They need healing, instruction and even their daily bread, having brought no food and Jesus faithfully serves them in all of these areas of need!

- **This is an encouraging and challenging example for all of us who are busy with LIFE:**

Our moms certainly understand how this works: The dirty diapers come at just the right times, don't they? As all of us carry out our callings, there are going to be those times where there is JUST TOO MUCH to be done, and then those critical interruptions always come at the WRONG time!

- **We must follow our Lord's example: Patiently getting our work done AND serving those in need...**
- **Sometimes even when they may be undeserving... like those who traveled with no food!**

Even when we have been working hard doing the right things and we KNOW that we need some rest, we must still be prepared to serve! This is why the world's "quality time" plan for raising children does not work! As I have often said, you will have no quality time IF there is not a lot of quantity time! Understanding this example is also an important part of the Christian training we must give our children:

- **Making life VERY smooth and making sure they get everything they want is no way to prepare hearty disciples for Jesus!**
- **This is the wisdom of Proverbs 14:4 "Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean; But from the strength of an ox, comes an abundant harvest."**

Our homes, our church and most of our lives can be very neat and clean IF we are not doing any real work!

- **Jesus needed some rest, but before He went off alone He served these people with instruction, healing and now food!**
- **We see that the disciples have not quite learned the lesson about Jesus as the Lord of Creation**

- They can't imagine how they would feed this crowd when they are challenged to do so by Jesus

All they have is some food that a young boy brought for lunch! There have been entire sermons preached on the willingness of this boy to give up his lunch, which is a good lesson, but we don't want to miss the shocking comparison either: *[bring out plate of food]* Here is an example of what we are talking about: This is what a modern Mom might send off as the picnic lunch: Five small sandwiches and some protein: Beef Jerky -- *She might still get away with the fish in England, but not here in America!*

So, now we can start to get a picture of this miracle:

We don't have fifty men here this morning, but let's just use our group as a starting point:

- What if I suggested we have lunch today with just this food?

Ridiculous, but possible... Everybody could have a tiny bit, but certainly no one would be filled!

HOWEVER, this group was not fifty men, but rather FIVE THOUSAND men plus the women and children...

That means that we have to picture me standing in front of a group well over ONE HUNDRED times the size of this congregation with this same small amount of food to pass out...

THAT would require a miracle!

- With that in mind, we are prepared to see the lessons of obedience from this young boy and the disciples...

The young boy was willing to give his food to Jesus in faith, not because he thought it could feed the crowd, but rather because it was requested of him by Jesus AND the disciples are now asked to set everyone down in groups of fifty: Those who faithfully help us set tables in this room after service can testify to the magnitude of the task begin required here: Getting everyone to sit in groups of fifty *[with no prearranged guest list to settle disputes!]* AND asking them to be prepared to eat, when there is no food available... Must have created some interesting discussions as this was taking place: Then we see Jesus as BOTH the Son of Man and the Son of God in verse 16: "Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the multitude."

Here again, entire sermons could be done on the Trinitarian implications and the importance of body posture!

At a minimum it should remind us of the importance of giving thanks for our daily bread – Something we may or may not be faithful in!

Jesus takes the bread & blesses it as He prepares to multiply it:

- **Reminding us that He, as Creator and Sustainer, does this with each harvest season that brings us our daily bread!**
- **One kernel of corn placed in the ground yields thousand of kernels – more than enough for our daily food and seed for next year, which we see in the 12 baskets left over**

But as John clearly explains in his Gospel, Jesus is also demonstrating the work of the Kingdom:

- **Jesus comes as the Bread of Life... Giving not just life, but life abundantly to ALL the nations of the world.**

Jesus does not bring down manna from heaven so that each group could then pick some up on their own

Jesus does not call each person up to receive bread and fish directly from His hands.

- **The text says that Jesus broke the food into pieces and gave it to His disciples who then carried it to the crowd...**
- **JUST as He has now given His Church the Great Commission with the gift of the Holy Spirit so we can take the Good News out to a needy world.**

Without Jesus, did it look like they had enough food to feed this crowd?

Were the Disciples up to the task?

No, it was impossible, just as our taking salvation to the world is NOT possible from a human standpoint:

In Luke's 18th chapter Jesus explains that salvation is tougher than having a camel [literally] go through the eye of a needle [literally] which rightly had the Disciples asking, "who then can be saved" BUT Jesus simply answered and said:

"The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

It was IMPOSSIBLE for the disciples to feed this crowd

It was IMPOSSIBLE for these same disciples to "make disciples of all the nations"

- **Jesus WAS able to feed this entire crowd and He used His disciples as the means to deliver the food!**
- **Jesus will bring in the fullness of the Gentiles and He uses US to deliver the Good News!**

We are not given most of details about just how this happened:

How much bread and fish did Jesus hand each disciple at a time?

How many trips did they have to make out to the hundreds of groups?

How long did all of this take?

Did people get seconds? *[I suspect that they did since the text says they “all eat and were filled”]*

However, we are given two details that are significant:

Jesus broke the bread and fish and gave it to His 12 disciples: The same twelve sent out to serve last week! In the end these same twelve gathered up the extra food into TWELVE baskets... That tiny lunch in the hands of Jesus fed the five thousand men plus women and children in Israel. Now the twelve disciples have twelve BASKETS of food with which to feed the seventy nations! We know that they did not understand all of this, but we should not miss that picture!

**So as we reflect on these things it should help us decide where we want to be in life:
W/ Jesus or the world?**

➤ **Do we want the bread of life or another feast and circus act?**

Would you rather join King Herod in his royal court with much feasting and entertainment?

OR go with Jesus into the wilderness where there will be bread and fish after much travel and a long day?

The world often looks at Covenant faithfulness and says BORING!

We tend to do it even within the church when we go looking for the exciting conversion testimony rather than the joy of a covenant child who has placed their faith in Jesus for as long as they can remember!

The world the flesh and the devil offer much feasting and entertainment but it is what we are warned against in the Proverbs that I hope most of us studied last month:

Proverbs 15:16 “Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure with trouble. 17 Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, Than a fatted calf with hatred.”

Proverbs 17:1 “Better is a dry morsel with quietness, Than a house full of feasting with strife.”

These are important choices and we face them and MUST make decisions everyday of our lives:

Do we start our days with prayer and the study of God’s Word...

➤ **Do we sit at the feet of Jesus so He can properly train us to take His blessings to the world?**

We face these choices and MUST make decisions each week:

Do we honor the Lord's Day?

- **Do we faithfully respond to His call to worship where He renews His covenant and sends us forth to disciple the nations?**

We face these choices and MUST make decisions for our entire lives:

- **Those who have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit belong to Christ and must serve Him faithfully!**
- **Those who have signed our membership covenant are not just on the rolls of the local church, but part of the community life we are commanded to live!**
- **Those who have taken marriage vows [*or soon will*] have become one flesh and must serve the living and reigning Savior as one flesh ALL their lives!**

What the world sees as some very poor choices, we should celebrate as we see Jesus give us life, true life, the abundant life that He promised. Like Simeon we are a people of great hope, contentment and vision:

- **God's people did NOT stay in the wilderness – They entered a land flowing with milk & honey!**
- **Jesus did not stay in that wilderness – He won the victory against sin and death and now reigns on high at the right-hand of God the Father sending forth His Spirit to His Church!**

With our quiet faithful choices we are bringing in the New Creation, being adorned as the Bride of Christ! We can be receiving and serving the Bread of Life or we can get distracted and be entertained by the world's "circuses"

- **These are choices we MUST make & we should choose wisely!**

We saw these choices presented clearly in the first Psalm as part of our daily readings this month:

Psalm 1:1 “Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; 2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper. 4 The ungodly are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind drives away. 5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish.”

- **Let us rise and heartily sing the words of this challenging and encouraging Psalm as those who rightly choose to serve our Reigning Lord this coming week!**