Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Week 66: The Lamb of God

Day 455: Share the wealth

When evening arrived, his disciples came to him saying, "This is an isolated place and the hour is already late. Send the crowds away so that they can go into the villages and buy food for themselves." But he replied, "They don't need to go. You give them something to eat." They said to him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish." "Bring them here to me," he replied. Then he instructed the crowds to sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves and two fish, and looking up to heaven he gave thanks and broke the loaves. He gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up the broken pieces left over, 12 baskets full. Not counting women and children, there were about 5,000 men who ate. (Matthew 14:15-21)

"Jesus, we're tired and hungry. Send everyone away so we can rest, and they can take care of themselves."

Have you ever wanted to do that? And yet Jesus says, "They don't need to go. You take care of them." And then Jesus supplied all that was needed.

I've heard that the only miracle, the true miracle here, was that people shared amongst themselves. Each had brought food along, and when the disciples shared, they copied them and found that they all had enough.

That may be true. But think this through a bit: Matthew thought this was a very significant event – so significant that He wanted to record it as part of His testimony that Jesus is The Anointed One. Would sharing your lunch with your neighbours be so significant?

Depends how selfish I was feeling at the time …

Good point! While sharing is a minor miracle, it is totally within the abilities and desires of us humans – nothing required outside of our will power and decision-making. That's not usually considered "miracle country."

So, what do you think happened?

How about, 5,000 men, plus women and children, ate 5 loaves and 2 fish, and the food multiplied so much that 12 baskets were left over?

Why?

First, we need to realize that Jesus not only spoke in parables, He acted them out. He lived parables. 5 fish + 2 loaves = 7. The number seven often symbolized completion or perfection. 5,000 could be a military grouping, as per Joshua 8:12 and Judges 20:45. And 12 commonly represented the 12 tribes of Israel (which is why it was significant that Jesus had 12 disciples: He was instigating the new Israel). So: the perfect/complete meal feeds the army of the Lord, with abundance (even over-abundance) for all the tribes of Israel in the New Creation, the Kingdom of God. That's one interpretation.

A second interpretation is that Matthew is letting us know that when we are tired, hungry, at wits end how to serve, if we focus on serving God's people in Jesus' kingdom, Jesus will enable us for this to happen. It's like when Elijah told God to just kill Him because He was overwhelmed, and God said, "Get out there and serve Me, silly man." (1 Kings 19:3-18).

To summarize, one possible reason: Jesus feeds the army of the Lord to over-abundance, demonstrating He has brought in the Kingdom of God. A second possible reason: Jesus demonstrating that we can count on Him to meet the needs of those we are serving, as we serve Him in the Kingdom of God. Regardless, the feeding of the 5,000 was part of Jesus' message that day.

Jesus is with you as you serve Him. The Kingdom of God is invisible to those who do not believe and may be hard to see even for those who do believe. It is important to hold onto your belief, knowing that Jesus is with you, and He will enable you to serve Him, to the glory of the Father. "Don't send them away. You feed them."

Make note of times when it has seemed impossible for Jesus' will to occur, for people to be fed and the Father glorified, yet it has happened.

Share your thoughts with those you trust.

Day 456: The Family of Christ is like …

"Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, while he dispersed the crowds. And after he sent the crowds away, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone. Meanwhile the boat, already far from land, was taking a beating from the waves because the wind was against it. As the night was ending, Jesus came to them walking on the sea. When the disciples saw him walking on the water they were terrified and said, "It's a ghost!" and cried out with fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them: "Have courage! It is I. Do not be afraid." Peter said to him, "Lord, if it is you, order me to come to you on the water." So he said, "Come." Peter got out of the boat, walked on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the strong wind he became afraid. And starting to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they went up into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."
After they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. When the people there recognized him, they sent word into all the surrounding area, and they brought all their sick to him. They begged him if they could only touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.
(Matthew 14:22-36)

There's a lot in this little passage.

1. After a momentous piece of work (feeding the 5,000), Jesus takes a break by being alone with our Father.
2. Jesus sends the disciples on to the next destination on their own.
3. Jesus appears to them, walking on the water.
4. Peter joins Jesus.
5. Jesus (probably) gently chastises Peter.
6. The weather calms down
7. Jesus heals all around Him.

What's new here?

All of it?

We've encountered most of it before.

Well – Jesus' walking on the water and Peter joining Jesus.

You're right – and you could argue that Jesus' walking on water is really an extension of His commanding the elements, which we encountered in chapter 8 of Matthew (day 399). Let's look at Peter joining Jesus.

First, the disciples thought they were seeing a ghost. So Peter, being brave, tests this out.

"Lord, if it is you, order me to come to you on the water."

Say what?
What do you mean, 'say what?'

Well, what if it wasn't Jesus? What if it was really a ghost, or worse, an evil spirit? What if it was something that lies?

Umm… Peter wasn't too smart?

Peter was human – impetuous probably, but human. After all His experiences so far, Peter's current problem wasn't one of faith, but rather, identification. He trusted that if it truly was Jesus, Jesus would want Peter with Him. And what did Peter find out?

He could walk on water?

I think Peter found out that when He believed in Jesus, focussed on Jesus, He could do as Jesus did. In other words, the Kingdom extended from Jesus to him. However, when Peter focussed on all that worked against Him, all that worked against Jesus, He started to drown.

Focus on Jesus, live in the kingdom. Focus on the world, drown in the world.

And Jesus says, "You almost had it! Why did you start to doubt?"

Write down all the ways you can focus on Jesus in your daily life, walking with Him and doing His will, copying what you see Him do. Pray that you do not doubt. Pray, "Lord, if this is you, bring me to you…"

Share your thoughts with those you trust.

Day 457: How do you worship?

Then Pharisees and experts in the law came from Jerusalem to Jesus and said, "Why do your disciples disobey the tradition of the elders? For they don't wash their hands when they eat." He answered them, "And why do you disobey the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Whoever insults his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say, 'If someone tells his father or mother, "Whatever help you would have received from me is given to God," he does not need to honor his father.' You have nullified the word of God on account of your tradition. Hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied correctly about you when he said, "'This people honors me with their lips, But their hearts are far from me, and they worship me in vain, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'" (Matthew 15:1-9)

The point is, what does God truly want, and are you doing it?

In Exodus 30:17-21, Aaron and his sons were commanded to wash whenever they approached the presence of the Lord or offered a food offering. The Pharisees had extended this practice.

Sacrificial offerings were first mentioned in Genesis and were a keystone of Israelite practice.

And Jesus is saying, "If someone has spent his wealth on a sacrifice so that he cannot help his father or mother, he is guilty of dishonouring his parents. This is against the will of God."

The point is not "are you washing" or "are you sacrificing." The point is not even 'did God ask for this?' The point is "does your action show true love?"

If your worship of God causes hardship to another – that is not worship which God can accept. If, however, your worship increases health, shows true love – then that is worship which follows the character of your loving Father, and which He gladly accepts.

Have you ever worshiped God in a way which harmed yourself or another? Have you ever worshiped God in a way which built up yourself or another?

How can you strive to always worship God in a way which pleases Him?

Share your thoughts in love, with those you love.

Day 458: The cause of defilement

Then He called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand. What defiles a person is not what goes into the mouth; it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles a person." Then the disciples came to him and said, "Do you know that when the Pharisees heard this saying they were offended?" And he replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father did not plant will be uprooted. Leave them! They are blind guides. If someone who is blind leads another who is blind, both will fall into a pit." But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us." Jesus said, "Even after all this, are you still so foolish? Don't you understand that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach and then passes out into the sewer? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these things defile a person. For out of the heart come evil ideas, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are the things that defile a person; it is not eating with unwashed hands that defiles a person.". (Matthew 15:10-20)

It is not what goes into you that defiles (or blesses) you. It's what comes out of you – out of your heart. If defilement comes out of you, you will be defiled. If blessings come out of you, you will be blessed.

Regardless of what goes into you, you have a choice of what comes out of you. You even have a choice, to an extent, of what goes into you. If your eye is defiling you, tear it out. A good tree bears good fruit. Be wheat, not darnel.

List all the ways you have blessed people today. Make a goal of blessing people continually, for this is the Way of Christ.

Share with your fellow explorers.

Day 459: Responding to faith and humility

After going out from there, Jesus went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that area came and cried out, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is horribly demon-possessed!" But he did not answer her a word. Then his disciples came and begged him, "Send her away because she keeps on crying out after us." So he answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and bowed down before him and said, "Lord, help me!" "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs," he said. "Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, your faith is great! Let what you want be done for you." And her daughter was healed from that hour. (Matthew 15:21-28)

"I'm not sent to you, go away." "I'm on vacation – don't bother me."

Jesus was focussed on God's people, and His mission amongst them – and again, He had gone to a foreign land (back up into Lebanon) for a vacation. But even on vacation, He does not get a rest. He even insults the woman! And the woman answers with earnest humility.

And so, Jesus heals.

Jesus will respond to all who come to Him in faith. List all those you are praying for, that they may come to Him and be healed, in whatever fashion they need to be.

Share your thoughts with your fellow explorers.

Day 460: A sequel

When he left there, Jesus went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up a mountain, where he sat down. Then large crowds came to him bringing with them the lame, blind, crippled, mute, and many others. They laid them at his feet, and he healed them. As a result, the crowd was amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing, and they praised the God of Israel.

Then Jesus called his disciples and said, "I have compassion on the crowd because they have already been here with me three days and they have nothing to eat. I don't want to send them away hungry since they may faint on the way." The disciples said to him, "Where can we get enough bread in this desolate place to satisfy so great a crowd?" Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" They replied, "Seven—and a few small fish." After instructing the crowd to sit down on the ground, he took the seven loaves and the fish, and after giving thanks, he broke them and began giving them to the disciples, who then gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. Not counting children and women, there were 4,000 men who ate. After sending away the crowd, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan. (Matthew 15:29-39)

According to the Gospel according to Mark, the feeding of the 4,000 occurred in the region of the Decapolis: Gentile territory. (Mark 7:31).

So, Jesus left Lebanon and went to the Gentile region of Galilee, on the east side of the lake. There, He healed many *gentiles*, and they praised the God of Israel.

He then fed them. We're confirmed that these feedings weren't the "miracles of sharing", as Matthew explicitly notes Jesus saying, "they have no food." Looking at this as a parable similar to the previous episode, the number 4000 can be related to the concept of completeness or fullness, similar to the number 7. So, the perfect/complete meal feeds the perfect people, and the perfect amount is left over. That's one interpretation.

A second interpretation is that once the Lamb of God has healed the People of God, He will heal the entire world. Once the Lamb of God has fed the People of God, He will feed the entire world.

The Lamb of God will heal and feed the entire world, for that is the will of the Father. How have you joined Him in His mission?

Share your thoughts with your fellow explorers

Day 461: Rest

Rest, receive nourishment, feed both body and soul. Reflect on the past week and care for your needs (body and spirit). Pray. Dedicate this day to God. Worship! Fill yourself with Light. In the evening get together with a group you trust and share what you would like to from the previous week – good points, hard points, what you've learned, what you've struggled with, etc. Decide again if you wish to continue journeying together or want to stop.

Know that God loves you. Celebrate, Rejoice, Give thanks, talk and walk with God. Be in shalom.