

Pastor Kevin Garman

Theme: Feeding Others

Scripture: Mark 6:30-44

March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021

## “Feeding Others and Starving Our Guilt: For God so Loved the World”

Last week we discussed Salome’s question to Jesus asking if her son’s could sit at Jesus’ right and left hand when he established the Kingdom of God. This week we look at the Feeding of the Five Thousand found in the Gospel of Mark to emphasize the theme of feeding others. Feeding others happens in a multitude of ways which are not exclusive to feeding others food as we will talk about today. Feeding others means taking care of our most basic human needs as we build a more equitable world for all. Feeding others should never be about guilty or shame because guilt and shame lead us to a state of apathy and pessimism. My professor at Iliff, Dr. Tink Tinker, would often remind us as we looked at Native American struggles in our coursework that, “Native Americans do not need people’s guilt or shame. Native Americans need people to listen and empathize with our struggles. Your guilt only leads you to apathy instead of actually supporting my people.” Feeding others is one of the most basic human experiences that all of us, regardless of our differences can participate in as we tell our stories through food and drink.

Food is an essential part of our culture. I am certainly biased in where I grew up because I view Southern food as the best possible food there is. However, through my travels and the different places I have lived, I have discovered everyone has their own staple dishes in which they tell about their culture, history, and people. In Florida, no surprise to anyone, it is seafood that makes this food unique as they are located on a peninsula and there are several different South Asian and Caribbean influences to their food. In Tennessee and Virginia, it is hearty, wholesome comfort foods and various forms of barbecue spanning all the way to Memphis to the hills of North Carolina where we battle it out to see who has the best barbecue in the region. In Colorado, it was a blend of TexMex and Indigenous foods and attempting to put anything and everything in a burrito. I haven’t been able to fully experience Montana’s cultural foods yet due to Covid-19, but from

what I can tell, there is a large influence of Norwegian and German foods in this region, hence the Lutefisk dinner.

Everyone has their own language and process for food too. If you make sausage gravy in the South without bacon grease, then you have committed one of the cardinal sins of the South and better pray a couple Hail Dollies (Dolly Parton is our queen) to repent for your sins. If someone in the Midwest asks you to bring a relish tray to your family supper, then they are asking you to bring a vegetable tray, as I would call it in the south. When everyone in Nebraska kept talking about how excited they were for a relish tray, I kept thinking to myself why are they eating various kinds of pickle relish? That sounds disgusting! We all have our own way of experiencing food and sharing our food with others.

It should be no surprise that food is a part of our rituals, traditions, and stories in our different faith traditions.

<sup>30</sup> The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup> He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. <sup>32</sup> And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. <sup>33</sup> Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. <sup>34</sup> As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. <sup>35</sup> When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; <sup>36</sup> send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat." <sup>37</sup> But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?" <sup>38</sup> And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." When they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." <sup>39</sup> Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. <sup>40</sup> So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. <sup>41</sup> Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. <sup>42</sup> And all ate and were filled; <sup>43</sup> and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. <sup>44</sup> Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men."

Jesus has just heard of the death of his friend, John the Baptist, which must mean Jesus must need a break from everything. He asks his disciples to get into the boat with him because they need to rest due to their non-stop traveling. Jesus and his disciples have amassed quite the following at this point with all different types of followers, travelers, homeless, and wanderers who are committed to the Jesus movement, and this group of people find out the place where Jesus is going next. By the time Jesus and his disciples leave the boat and go back towards the city, these followers are already waiting for him.

Jesus sees the crowd and takes compassion on them and begins teaching them, which seems to frustrate the disciples. The disciples say to Jesus, "Send these people away. It's getting late and this isolated place outside the city is perfect for resting. Send them away so they can get some food." (Mark 6: 35-36). Jesus responds, "Fine. Then feed them so they can be on their way." (Mark 6:37). The disciples get a little sarcastic and retort back, " Oh sure, Jesus. We will just go into town and buy eight months of bread to feed them" (Mark 6:38). Instead of getting in a tit-for-tat battle of how they are going to supply the food necessary to feed everyone, Jesus asks them to gather what food they had among themselves, which amounts to five loaves of bread and two whole fishes. Jesus blesses the meal and instead of everyone going hungry, they have a feast of a lifetime and have enough leftovers to fill twelve basketfuls of leftover food.

The travelers most likely had their own food that they began sharing with each other, which is why there was so many leftovers and why so many were able to eat their fair share. However, it matters not on how they ate, how the food was so plentiful, or the exact numbers of followers or food that was eaten that day. What really matters most is Jesus and his disciples taught thousands of people this day to share food with your neighbor, eat a meal with them as you share stories and experiences with each other, and above all, see the love in your neighbor when you break bread and share stories together. I do not think it is a coincidence that the majority of our cultural traditions throughout the world are often found sitting around a table as we break bread together.

To wrap back around to what we started with, we should never feel guilty or shameful when we are unable to feed our families or help feed our neighbors, because our guilt is no good for the action serving others requires. Rev. George says, "Guilt is a lousy way to gain support even for the most worthy cause. It may persuade us to give some of our money, but giving money only good in the *short term*. Guilt does little to connect us with

the deeper needs and causes of these situations. It does not necessarily encourage us to take action that will effect change" (Hovaness Donigian p. 47). The gospel is always an invitation of participation. We do not have to respond to the gospel even though we undoubtedly should. More often than not, we will be the disciples who facetiously respond to Jesus' calling by labeling the moment impossible. More often than not, when we go to carry out the mission of Christ, we will lack trust in Jesus' words and mission just like Peter did when Jesus asks him to step out of the boat into the water due to our fear and past failures. More often than not, we will expect immediate answers and ask questions we don't understand just like Salome, James, and John did in our story from last week. However, the invitation to the table of grace is always extended to us through the work of the Holy Spirit, the service of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the love of God for all the Divine's creation. Let us invite everyone to table of grace as we feed others throughout our homes, communities, and world. Amen.