

## SERMON

August 3, 2008

“God feeds us”

By the Rev. Bill Fulton

When I was 20 years old, I decided I wanted to backpack through the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness in Idaho. So instead of going back to college that fall, I took a bus and hitchhiked to Darby, Montana, and I started my backpacking trip into the wilderness area. I planned to be gone for ten days, and I packed as light as I could, especially food. For lunch every day I planned to cook a package of dried soup and have a handful of trail mix. Well soup isn't very filling so I just ate more trail mix, and after about three days, I could see that my trail mix was about three fourths gone. I thought, “Oh no! Am I going to have enough?”

So I began to ration my remaining trail mix, eating just a tiny bit each day. By the seventh day of my trip, I was really hungry. I was running out of energy because I wasn't eating enough. On that day I came across a rustic dude ranch in the wilderness. They had a number of tents set up in a meadow and they brought visitors in on horseback. The camp cook saw me walking by, and she invited me into the cook tent for a cup of coffee. While we were talking, she saw me looking at the bread and peanut butter they kept in the table. She said, “Help yourself to the bread and peanut butter.” By the time I left, I'd eaten about half a loaf of bread and half a jar of peanut butter! But I learned on that trip to be sure to take enough food the next time.

Our Gospel story today is the story of how Jesus fed the 5000 with five loaves of bread and two fish. But before I get to that I'd like to tell you a story I read by a priest named Terry Martin.

Terry had a difficult life as a young kid, and he ran away from home as a teenager and at 17 he was living on the street. He had a car, which set him apart from the other homeless kids he hung around with because it meant he always had a place to sleep. He says that one night during a particularly bad stretch when he and his friend hadn't eaten for a few days and they were truly hungry. They were low on gas and finally the car ran out of gas and he let it roll to the curb and they parked there. It was raining and they were stuck there in the car. He started to talk about how in the morning they could walk to the high school and borrow some money for gas and then earn some money by shuttling students to the burger joint. Finally his friend erupted in anger. He said, “I don't get it. Here we are, cold and wet and starving and you just think tomorrow's gonna be fine. Well, it's not gonna be fine! I hate living like this! What is it that keeps you going?” Terry got out of the car and started running to get away from this anger and he ran until he came to a ballpark where there was a dugout he could use for shelter. He was exhausted from malnutrition and the daily struggle to keep alive, and he prayed to God. “I'm so tired God. I don't want to live like this either. Just take me now.” And he drifted off into a deep sleep. When he awoke, he felt stronger and more hopeful. Then he remembered his friend. And he realized the difference between him and his friend was that he always felt like God was with him, and his friend didn't know that feeling. He knew that God was going to take care of him and that somehow he would have enough. He lived through that, and eventually he went to college and seminary and became an Episcopal priest with a ministry to people on the streets.

Well, I would like to say that I always believe that there's going to be enough, that God will always take care of me, but sometimes I worry. I worry that there won't be enough. Enough money, enough food,

enough whatever. I hear about the escalating cost of food and increasing economic problems worldwide and I begin to think “Do I have enough?” It’s not a rational thought...rationally I know I’m OK. But it’s my inner fear that starts to gnaw at me. Like Terry’s friend, I fear not having enough. And I know there are people in our community who have “food insecurity” and people in the world who are malnourished because they don’t have enough to eat. So I worry.

Well, in the Gospel story today, Jesus is teaching and healing a great crowd of people on the hillside. And when it gets to be evening, his disciples come to him and say, “It’s almost evening and this is a deserted place. Send the people away so they can go into the towns and buy food for themselves. And Jesus says, “You give them something to eat.” They say, “All we have is five loaves and two fish.” So Jesus says, “Bring them here to me.” And he has all the people sit down on the grass.

He takes the loaves and the fish and he blesses them and breaks the loaves and gives them to the disciples to give to the people to eat. And everyone eats, and everyone has enough, and there are twelve baskets left over. Five thousand men, plus women and children are fed. There is enough.

Well, this story is presented as a miracle of Jesus. I’m not sure how you see it. Some people say what really happens here is that when the people see the generosity of Jesus and the disciples, they start pulling out the bread and fish from their pockets and adding them to the baskets, and when everyone shares, there’s enough for everyone.

But whether you see it as a miracle of multiplication or a miracle of generosity, it’s still a miracle of sorts. And the point of the story is that – God feeds us.

Whether it’s on a hillside in Galilee or on a dark rainy night or in the middle of a wilderness, God feeds us. In the Psalm, the Psalmist says, “The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord, and you give them their food in due season. You open wide your hand, and satisfy the needs of every living creature.”

A couple of nights ago I met my neighbor, Bob Best, who has lived in Silverdale all his life. He told me about the history of the land he lives on, how it was owned by Japanese immigrants before WWII and they farmed oysters in the bay and chickens on the hillside. He told me how there used to be farms on these hills where there are now big box stores. He said he keeps his land undeveloped and he and his family are determined to keep the land in a land trust so that it will always be open space. He’ll always be able to put a shovel in that ground and put seeds in the ground.

I walked home and I saw Katy’s garden in our yard, and for dinner we had lettuce and zucchini fresh out of her garden. She’s got squash and pumpkins and beans and carrots and tomatoes that are going to be producing pretty soon. And when I look at that bounty, I realize, “There’ll be enough.”

We’re going to go to Communion in a few minutes. Holy Communion is a meal we share together. It’s a meal that reminds us of many things, but the one that I’m thinking of this morning especially is the feeding of the five thousand. Just like Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and shared it, we’ll do the same thing this morning. And just like there was enough for the five thousand people that day, we know that there will be enough for us this day as well. There is enough.

I visited Virginia Henderson the other day at the Martha and Mary Rehab center in Poulsbo. She's very old and frail and she can't do much at all because of her Parkinson's disease. We shared Communion and as I got ready to go, I asked her, "Is there anything I can bring you next time I come?" She said, "No, I have everything I need." And as I walked down the hall, I marveled at that answer. She has almost nothing left in this world, and yet she could say, "I have everything I need." And if she could say it, surely, I could, too. Yes, God has given me everything I need.  
Amen.

The story by Terry Martin may be found at  
<http://fathertlistenstotheworld.blogspot.com/2008/07/urgency-of-mission.html>