

Each week, we come to church and hear a different Biblical story. We learn how we may apply it to our lives today, for these are timeless truths. If we're practicing Christians, that is we put into use those things we learn each week, we'll notice that the stories build upon one another.

All of the lessons we've heard in the last couple of months are important as foundational building blocks to the message today.

Since January, we've heard about reflecting Christ's light in the world. We've heard about being tested in our faith. We heard Jesus tell us that we are to Love God and love our neighbors. We learned that we shouldn't judge others. Then 'just, there are weeds growing among the wheat, there are good and bad people on earth'. We are to love them all and let God sort it out. We also learned that God is at work in the world whether we can see it or not. Just last week, we saw how God's power took a tiny seed and multiplied it. In the same way, the flour rose into bread with the addition of leaven. God's power creates abundance.

Today we heard about the miracle of loaves and fishes. This is the only story that shows up in all four gospels. There are a few parables that turn up in one or two of them, but this one is in all four. The gospels were written at different times, for different audiences, but something about this miracle—or the implications of this miracle for each generation—was important enough that it was shared over and over again.

Why? And what does it mean for us today?

Something that we could easily overlook today is the very real nature of food insecurity in Biblical times. We probably all had breakfast this morning. If we didn't, it may have been by choice, not because we had no food and no access to food.

Earlier in the gospel, Matthew has chronicled Jesus' instruction for prayer. Together, each week, we pray that prayer. The Lord's Prayer. In it, we acknowledge our community "Our" Father. Give "us" this day "our" daily bread. If food were not an issue, it wouldn't likely be the very first of three things we ask of God. Give us our daily bread, forgive us as we forgive others, and keep us on the up and up (keep us from temptation and deliver us from evil). Our food source, then is God. And we can rely on God to provide for our needs.

In those days, there was no middle class. There were the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. We see Jesus flit between these social classes easily. The Pharisees, tax collectors, and soldiers AND the lepers, the women and children, and his own disciples, the now unemployed fisherman.

In today's passage, a great big crowd has gathered to listen to Jesus. There are more than 5,000 people (because only the men were actually counted and we know that there were women and children in the crowd, too.) They've come from some distance and apparently been there a while.

They may have gone to a place with natural amplification and that's why they were away from town. There is evidence to show that some areas had certain rock formations and shelves that would make for a natural amphitheatre.

At any rate, the disciples come to him like a stage manager and say, basically, 'it's time to wind things down. It's getting late and people are getting hungry. Let them go buy food in the village before it gets dark.' And what does Jesus do? He says, "YOU feed them." (What?! Can't you hear

the disciples now? How are we going to feel 5,000 people. Jesus has some nice ideas, but really???) Jesus has just said to them exactly what he's saying to us now. "You see a need. Go attend to it."

I feel fairly secure in saying that if I said I really needed a cup of coffee, but that I had no money for one, every single person here would be willing to buy me a cup of coffee. I also think that if I took up a collection for the food pantry, you'd be willing to put in a can or two. But what about giving to the person on the street?

Remember, a few weeks ago we learned about not judging or feeling superior to others. I want to tell you now about two times I saw the face of God.

Once was when I lived in California. I moved across country without a job and had a heck of a time finding one. Everyone I met was beautiful, 18, and size zero. Those are the people who had all the jobs. (As an aside, I couldn't afford to eat out a lot, but when I did, I noticed the most beautiful waitresses and most handsome waiters! They were all aspiring Hollywood stars.)

I had an interview at Nordstrom in a mall called The Grove. It's a beautiful, upscale outdoor mall right next to CBS' "Television City" studio where they filmed The Late Late Show, Dancing with the Stars, and back in the day, "The Sonny and Cher Show". Parking is at a premium there so it's a paid parking garage. I was running pretty low on funds and actually only had \$2.00 on me, so I parked a few blocks away and began to walk to the interview.

I was only a few feet from my car when I was approached by a man somewhere between 50-60 years old. He asked me for money. I supposed I looked as though I had money to spare all dressed up for the interview, wearing a designer handbag. To look at us, we looked echelons apart in social standing. And yet, we both had needs. I told him that I was sorry I couldn't help him. I didn't have a job and I was even now on my way to an interview. He said, "yes, but at least you have a car to get you here." I continued to walk on and replayed his words in my head.

It wasn't long before I realized he was right. I was one of the 'haves' and I had just been made aware of a need. I ran back to him, high heels clicking on the pavement and give him my last two dollars. He needed it more than I. He said, "God bless you" and I knew God just had.

Another time I saw God was in Boston just about a year ago. I'd gone to a matinee of "Love Never Dies" (the sequel to Phantom of the Opera). I bought the ticket through a last minute reseller and still paid way too much for it (over a hundred dollars) and when you add parking I was in it for about \$150.

I exited the theatre with the men in their suits, ladies in their furs, and the children all dressed up and carrying souvenirs from the show. In the crush of people was a man asking, "Can you spare a dollar?" Like the others, I walked right by him until the Holy Spirit reminded me that I had a conscience. Until I remembered Jesus told the disciples, "YOU feed them."

I fought my way against the crowd—really, it was like a salmon swimming upstream—but I got back to him and said, "I see you". I handed him something—5 or 10 dollars, it wasn't much. And something happened that I didn't expect. He started crying. I don't know if it was relief at what could buy him a hamburger or that he could now go use a fast food restroom "for paying customers" or if it's that so few people were responding to a need that he was expressing.

People were still streaming by us. People who, like I, had spent easily a hundred dollars each for a two hour experience, but who would ignore the opportunity to share their abundance with someone in need.

The interesting thing about the miracle of the loaves and fishes is that we know *what* happened, but we never hear *how* it happened.

We know that there were 5 loaves of bread and two fish and somehow after Jesus broke the items, there was enough for everyone to eat and there were 12 baskets of left overs. We don't hear about a flash of light or the voice of God. We don't hear of angels appearing in the sky. We know there was a great need and that the disciples put forth what they had.

It could certainly be that a God who created heaven and earth could have multiplied the bread and fish.

There is some scholarly thought that if people were going a distance and planned to be out for a while, they might have brought some food along with them, like a picnic. (Not so different that what you or I might do today. Anyone have mints, gum or a snack bar with them now?)

Given everything Jesus taught us about loving our neighbors (and remember, it really mean doing acts of love for our neighbors), it may be that people were moved to see Jesus and the disciples willingly giving of their own supplies to meet the need in front of them.

It could be that people were so touched that they were inspired to share what they brought with them for the day.

There is enough—of everything—for everyone. It's up to us to make sure it's distributed equitably. It could well be that the lesson in loaves and fishes is that we are to share what we have to meet the needs of those around us. And wouldn't that be a miracle in deed? Blessed be and amen.