

It's a little bit funny how such a simple straightforward story can have so many undertones – sort of like a family story that is simple in its telling but has a LOT of history behind it.

We all know this story about Jesus and 5 loaves and 2 fish and 5000 folk sitting around a grassy hill and how everyone went home stuffed to the gills with 12 baskets of extra carried down to the local community feeding center. It was certainly in the top 10 in my Sunday School flannelboard years.

It is a story about generosity and hunger and life. I am fairly sure that the anonymous lad who offered up his 5 loaves and 2 fish wasn't the only person in that huge crowd who had brought a little something to eat with them that day. I expect lots of folks had something tucked inside their cloak.

But the story focuses on one nameless boy who offered to Jesus his entire lunch! Now I have two grandsons and neither would ever give away their whole lunch – these boys are always hungry. But that is the picture: one boy gives his entire lunch to Jesus.

Now who is this Jesus? The folks had come because Jesus' was a known healer. Some were there just to watch but many were there to circumvent a medical system which has forever been expensive and in their case was too often unable to help much.

So, some of the folk thought Jesus was just a miracle healer. Some had heard of his teaching and thought he was a prophet of some sort. Some were curious and some thought he was a fraud (the Bible doesn't say this but you and I know human nature!)

After Jesus gives thanks for the meager meal, it becomes a veritable feast – feeding everyone, full up to the brim and overflowing. At this point, either we witness a miracle of dividing bread and multiplying fish or we witness a miracle of people taking care of one another by sharing their own stash. Either Jesus offered thanks and the fish kept coming OR Jesus offered thanks and everyone took out the lunch they had hidden and began to share it with their neighbors until everyone was stuffed and there were 12 baskets of extras.

That kind of sharing is its own kind of miracle. We've watched the story shift from too little to too much, from hungry crowds to full stomachs.

So we have a story about the significant generosity of a child becoming the overflowing abundant generosity ofwell, either everyone in the crowd or..... Who is this Jesus?

Which leads us to another byway in this story. Who is it who can – out of nowhere – provide enough bread for folks to stuff themselves? Who is it that pours out manna from heaven? Didn't that happen once before in Israel's history? Could Jesus be..... well, possibly Moses.

Moses was an important guy. He faced down Pharaoh, parted the Red Sea, talked to God, led Israel out of slavery into freedom AND....persuaded God to provide that manna in the wilderness. Moses. Was. The. Man.

The premiere prophet, and although no one had seen Moses' equal through all the generations, God said there would be another. Could Jesus be the new Moses?

Another question. Had Jesus fed all these folks just to get them to stick around and listen to what he had to say? Did Jesus recognize that the hunger of their tummies was small in comparison to the hunger of their lives...of their souls? Was the bread just a jumping off place for something much larger? What kind of bread do we need to satisfy the hunger of our souls?

Just exactly who is this Jesus? Well, the story is not over. Come back next week as we continue to search for an answer.

But some last words about this fish story.

Breaking bread with strangers is a sure fire way to break down barriers. Sharing a meal helps us cross cultural, economic, and racial barriers. Pass the peas and the next thing you know you're sharing your grandmother's recipe for peach preserves and telling each other about your grandchildren.

Food has an amazing power to help folks to heal, to lower their defenses, and to open us up to new experiences. A shared meal almost requires small talk – and it is in the small talk that we get to know one another.

Jesus put a meal at the center of our faith life. 'Do this in remembrance of me,' he taught us. Do this. Sit down together, look at each other across the table. Take the time to see that other folk are as hungry as you are.....they have come to this table looking for relief, for some kind of healing, for a chance to belong to this group, to be counted worthy enough to receive some bread.

Take and eat. Take and drink. We come to his table as beggars – seeking relief, lifting up empty hands and receiving the gift of bread – the gift of life. Each time we tell the story again – ‘on the night in which he was betrayed, he took bread’.... Each time we return to this table there is always enough to feed us, to feed our neighbor, to feed the whole cosmos.

We call this meal the Eucharist: the thanksgiving. Such a tepid word for a life changing, soul healing, burden lifting invitation to live. Oh yes Lord, we give thanks, and on our very best days, we also offer up in thanksgiving our own 5 loaves and 2 fish – all that we have – so others might eat at this table as well. Your generosity inspires us to be generous with others: ‘Here Lord,’ we say, ‘see what you can do with this.’

And our Lord says, ‘All is forgiven. Be at peace. Let us begin again.’

Amen