**You Give Them Something to Eat**

*Rev. John Allen*

I have to admit. There are some weeks when preaching a whole sermon seems a little redundant.

After all, in this service already we have baptized Oliver, which is better than any sermon I could ever preach in reminding us that God’s love for us is unconditional. God love for us knows no beginning. No ending. It does not depend on what we do. Or how we turn out. It simply is.

Of course, you’ve already seen that.

And you heard a testimony from Jeremie about: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Which is better than any sermon I could preach about the importance of: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

And you have seen our children gather and bless food for the hungry, which is better than any sermon I could preach about how Jesus taught us that we will be judged by how we care for the most vulnerable people in our midst.

And that is not to mention that later in this service we will be dedicating our pledges to the church for the coming year, which is better than any sermon I could preach about the power of this community, and our shared commitment to doing the hard and faithful work of being Christ’s hands and feet in the world.

So there are going to be plenty of moments in this service that bear witness to the truth of God’s love, and the role of this community, even if I were to not say another word.

[long pause]

But… I wouldn’t want to be accused to shirking my responsibilities.

And preaching here is about my favorite thing I get to do each week.

So, let me say, just a few more words.

[pause]

The story of the feeding of the crowd with loaves and fish is one of only 10 stories about Jesus that appear in all four gospels.

And it is actually so important, that it appears twice in the Gospel of Mark.

It is a familiar story to many of us, Jesus sits down a crowd, and with only a few loaves of bread and a few fish miraculously feeds the multitude, and baskets overflow with leftovers, more than there even was to begin with.

In Mark’s telling of the story, which we heard this morning, there is this brief exchange between the disciples and Jesus. It is the disciples who come to Jesus. There is after all a crowd to be fed, and not much food around.

The problem seems so overwhelming that the disciples cannot imagine what possible solution there could be.

So they go to Jesus. And the best they can imagine is “Jesus, you better tell these people to go find food in the surrounding towns.”

And Jesus says: “You give them something to eat.”

They are incredulous ‘Are we to go and buy thousands of dollars worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?’

And he said to them, ‘Go and see what you have, and, they said, ‘Five loaves, and two fish.’

So rather than send the people away, Jesus tells them to sit, and eat their fill. And everyone has all they want, with plenty leftover.

Of course the most immediately striking feature of this story is the miraculous intervention of Jesus, to make just a few loaves and fish enough to feed an entire crowd.

But just as important is the fact that before the miracle could take place, the disciples, the ordinary people who followed Jesus, had to do what they could.

Jesus said: You give them something to eat.

You gather together the very best that you can. It might not seem like much, but I am going to do something extraordinary with it.

You give them something to eat. You go find all you can. They very best that you can. And bring it to me.

And so we have.

We have brought what we could muster. Mac and cheese, and cans of tuna. But of course, it’s not enough. Not for all those who go to bed hungry this evening.

We have brought what gifts we can, after prayerful reflection, and conversation. We are bringing our pledges here to dedicate them to one another and to God. But of course it won’t be enough. Not to do everything that we could to make God’s love and justice come alive.

We have brought ourselves. Our imperfect selves. We who stumble and fail as often as we soar. We who bicker. We who doubt. We who fear. And of course we know that even the most faithful work of our hands is not ever enough to heal all the world’s brokenness, or ease every burden of those we love.

And so we are here today. On this beautiful day. Filled with so many signs and witnesses to the very best this community is. The very best we seek to be.

Faith-filled youth.

God’s promises sealed in water.

Food for hungry mouths.

A word of hungry hearts.

Pledges for our future.

And of course, in our hands, it is not enough. It never would be.

But, today we give it all over to God.

We will place our confidence in something bigger than ourselves. We will join a movement of faithful people that stretches beyond these pews and around the world.

We will drive our food to the food bank where there will be a line of cars and trucks each waiting to drop a few loaves and a few fish.

When you the pledge forms in the box, try to see them not a a piece of paper, but as a prayer lifted up, or the organ swelling in praise. Or picture a pastor sitting at a bedside, or a child learning about the good samaritan.

And when you look at this food, piled high. Try to see past the boxes and cans. Try to see the tables that these gifts will be spread on. And the people who will laugh and smile together around these meals.

We are going to gather together the very best that we can. It might not seem like much, but God is going to do something extraordinary with it.

And so we stand today, before Christ. Like those disciples. Who gathered up what they could and brought it to him.

“Its only a few loaves of bread and two fish.” They said. “We know its not enough.”

And Christ smiled and said:

“Tell the people to sit down.”