

**First Presbyterian Church  
Southampton, New York  
“A Truly Satisfying Meal”**

**John 6:1 – 15**

**July 26, 2015**

On Friday night, Sylvia and I went out to dinner at one of our favorite restaurants... Rumba Bar and Grill in Hampton Bays. As usual, she got the jerk chicken with coconut risotto, and I got the smothered pulled rib tacos. (And, no, “jerk chicken” was not some snarky reference to me!) The food was delicious, and we walked out of the restaurant completely satisfied... and totally stuffed. I mean, if I ate another bite, I’d have looked like the Goodyear Blimp sailing out of there! When I say we were full, I mean we were *full*!

So, it came as a bit of a surprise when the very next night, Saturday, right around five or six o’clock... we found ourselves getting hungry again. And not just hungry, but *really* hungry; like, we were going to need to do dinner all over again. And I don’t mean that we had to go back to Rumba; I just mean that, even after being totally pigged out on Friday, by Saturday, our stomachs were empty and in definite need of a refill. So, last night we pulled some leftovers out of the fridge, jumbled them all together, threw ‘em in the microwave... and we had another thoroughly tasty, and totally satisfying meal.

But, I don’t know... I’ve got this sneaking suspicion that, by this evening, we’re going to be hungry for dinner yet again; and we’re going to have to go through the dinner-eating process all over again. Because, although we were totally full yesterday... we’re still going to be totally hungry today. And I’ve even noticed this phenomenon with our cat, Vic. Because, although I feed him a bowl full of cat food every night... every morning, at 5:00 a.m., he’s sitting on my chest saying, “Meow, meow, meow... meow!” Which, translated into human, means, “Get up and feed me, fool!”

Now, I’m sure that this needing-to-eat-every-day experience isn’t unique to me... and I know that all of you face the same situation in your own lives, too. No matter how much food we eat, it never truly, and permanently, satisfies us. And I want us to keep that reality in the back of our mind, as we switch gears and look at our Scripture lesson for this morning... from the Gospel of John.

In our text, we find John’s account of one of Jesus’ best known, and most clearly remembered miracles: the feeding of more than five thousand people, with just a few loaves of bread and couple of sardine-sized fish. All four gospels record this event; and although a host of latter-day theologians and dubious New Testament scholars have tried to explain away the miraculous dimension of Jesus’ actions... the gospel writers all definitely mean for us to understand that what Jesus did was a miracle; or, a “sign” as John calls miracles in his gospel.

This wasn’t just a case of Jesus stimulating the attitude of sharing and generosity among the people of the crowd, who already had with them food for their own meals; it wasn’t a case of everyone eating just a crumb or two in order to stretch the skimpy provisions an extra-long way; and it wasn’t just a made-up story to make Jesus look more important than He really was. No, John and Matthew and Mark and Luke all included this event in their gospels in order to tell us that

Jesus had the power to feed a vast multitude of people... with just a tiny handful of supplies. With almost nothing to work with, Jesus was able to satisfy the hunger of thousands.

That's what happened that day, in that lonely place near the shore of the Sea of Galilee. And the question for us this morning, which is the same question that faced the five thousand people who were actually there that day... isn't, how did Jesus do it? Or, *did* Jesus really do it? The question of the day is, "**Why** did Jesus do it?" Why did Jesus take those five small barley loaves and two small fish... and with just that, feed more than the entire population of the Village of Southampton?

Well, obviously, part of the reason why is because He had compassion for a crowd of hungry people, who were out there in the middle of nowhere specifically to hear Him. John doesn't emphasize this aspect of the story, but some of the other gospel writers do. Jesus fed the people, in part, because He felt sorry for them; and because He knew that they needed physical nourishment in order to make it back to their homes and villages.

But, on a much deeper level, the answer to the question of why Jesus did it, is because He wanted to alert the people to the fact that they were in the presence of something far more important, and far more powerful, than they had as yet realized. By doing what He did, Jesus was pointing that crowd toward a spiritual reality of utterly crucial significance. Which is why John, in our text, calls this event "a miraculous sign."

And, in the New Testament, what is a "sign?" It's something that catches and directs our attention to something more important; something of heavenly, eternal significance. Jesus never did *any* miracle just for the fun of it; and that's absolutely the case with the feeding of the five thousand. He intended this miracle to awaken His audience to a much bigger truth. But that audience, even including the twelve disciples, didn't really understand the meaning of the sign until they, like Sylvia and me the day after our very filling meal at Rumba, started to get hungry all over again.

John tells us that, at first, the people followed Jesus because they were impressed by how he satisfied their physical hunger in such an incredible way. They were hungry, Jesus fed them, and they were now saying, "*Hey, I want to be with this guy! Because I'm getting hungry again, and I know that He can take away that hunger! We don't need a new grocery store here in Galilee... we just need to stick close to Jesus at dinnertime!*"

And that's a natural enough way to feel, right? Like, "*I just had the most unforgettable meal of my life; and it didn't cost me a thing, and I didn't have to lift a finger! I want more of that, and this is the guy that can give it to me!*"

But Jesus responds to this way of thinking, later, in a part of chapter six that we didn't read this morning, by saying, in essence:

*"No, no, no. You're missing the point! You're not following the sign to where it's trying to lead you! You're following me because you ate your fill of bread; but I didn't come to give you earthly bread that will only fill you temporarily, and which one day will go bad and spoil. No, I came to give you heavenly bread that will fill not your stomachs, but your souls... and it will fill them with eternal life! I performed that miraculous sign so that you'd realize that I have the power to nourish you completely! Totally! Eternally! And that with me, you will have all... that... you... need!"*

The people responded to this by asking, “*What do we have to do to get this never-ending supply of bread of which you speak?*” To which Jesus answered: “*I am the Bread of Life! Whoever comes to me will never hunger; whoever believes in me will never thirst.*” In other words, when you partake of *me*; when you bring *me* into your heart; then you will have eternal life... the fullness of life... the gift of ultimate peace and purpose in life, which your Heavenly Father has always intended for you.

And therein is the point of the miracle, the meaning of the sign: Jesus is our bread. Jesus is our nourishment. Jesus is our hope, for this life and the life to come. And with Him in our hearts, we will never go spiritually hungry again. And this truth is emphasized by the fact that there were twelve basketsful of leftover bread fragments, collected after the meal was over. Those baskets, full of leftovers, was meant to signify that Jesus has more than enough to nourish and satisfy our hearts and souls.

When Jesus takes up residence in our lives, there will be no scrimping, no half-size portions, no “Weight Watchers” or “Ultra-Slim Fast” approach to our spiritual nourishment! Jesus wants to take us and fill us wholly... with the eternal life which only He is able to provide. And that’s truly the most satisfying meal that we will ever know!

Which brings us back to this morning, and our ongoing life of Christian discipleship in another Southampton summer season. Of course, as I said before, we all know what it’s like to get hungry over and over again... no matter how much we stuff ourselves from one day to the next. Even the best steak, the fattest sandwich, or the most mouthwatering order of osso bucco you ever had in your life... will never assuage our physical hunger forever. If we want to keep breathing, we’ve got to keep eating... that’s just the way it is, where our stomachs are concerned.

And the same set of circumstances can hold true with regard to our hearts, too... when we try to fill them up with things of this world that have no lasting spiritual nourishment. Money, good looks, popularity, the power to manipulate others to get our way, status in the eyes of our peers, and so on... all of these things can satisfy the longing of our hearts, and the hunger of our souls. But not for long. And certainly not forever.

Because, no matter how much we have and how much we do; no matter how vaunted we may be in the opinion of our society; no matter how much we stuff ourselves with the fleeting bread of this world; we will still wake up one day and realize that we’re *empty*... and needing to be filled up, over and over again. Or, as the Greek philosopher Plato put it in his *Republic*, we are like leaky vessels; we keep seeking to fill ourselves, but we never fill up. So we are forever seeking for more and different gratifications, more driven by our appetites the more we try to satisfy them.

And, throughout His ministry, Jesus kept saying the very same thing... that, in order to be fully and eternally nourished, we need something more than what this life and this world is able to give. And as He demonstrated with the feeding of the five thousand, that “something more” is none other than He, Jesus, Himself! With Jesus in our hearts, with Christ as a welcome part of our life, we are no longer vessels that leak; we are finally and fully whole... and partakers of the true life that our Lord has intended for us since before we were even born.

As Saint Augustine says at the beginning of his *Confessions*, “*Great art thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; ... thou has formed us for thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in thee.*” When our hearts find rest in our Lord; when we allow Jesus to nourish and strengthen our spirits; when we give up the exhausting effort to fill ourselves constantly with more, and more,

and more... and allow our Heavenly Father to finally have His way with us; then we will find peace, and grace, and wholeness, and joy. And we will be truly satisfied... like no prix-fixe, fine-dining, escargot-laden meal will ever be able to accomplish!

As we make our way through these remaining weeks of summer, may such spiritual fullness and satisfaction always be our goal. And may we trust that our Lord will never leave us empty! For that is His promise! In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen!