

Westminster Sermon - Little is Much (When God is in It)

Sunday, August 14, 2022

Scripture: 1 Samuel 16:1-13, John 6:1-13

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1 Samuel 16:1-13

One recurring theme in the Bible is God choosing the weak or less likely to show God's own power to save. In first Samuel, Samuel is commissioned to anoint the next king and is sent to Jesse's family. He looks at all of his big, strong sons, but God whispers in his ear, "No, not that one," until all are rejected. He asks Jesse, "Are these all of your sons?" "Well, the 'kid' is out tending the sheep," he replies. And you know the rest of the story. To underscore this theme, in the next chapter, David is sent to give his older brothers a "care package" while fighting the Philistines in Saul's army. When he arrives Goliath is taunting the Israelites: "I challenge your best warrior to single combat – let's see how powerful your God is." No one steps forward, and David is incensed. "He's blaspheming God – I can take him on!" His brothers try to restrain him, but finally relent, and using the skills he used to protect the family sheep, David brings down the mighty Goliath!

Jesus frequently picks up this theme, choosing fishermen as his disciples instead of more learned candidates. Common objects are the subjects of his parables. One miracle appears in all four Gospels.

John 6:1-13

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias.^[a] ² A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³ Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵ When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?' ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, 'Six months' wages^[b] would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.' ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹ 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?' ¹⁰ Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they^[c] sat down, about five thousand in all. ¹¹ Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.' ¹³ So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets.

Notice that the disciples do not have enough to feed the multitude. Jesus asks them again, "What do we have?" Besides their meager treasury, a young boy has five loaves and two fish. That's enough. Jesus instructs everyone to sit down, and using actions familiar to us with Holy Communion, he takes the elements, offers thanksgiving to God, and then breaks the bread and distributes the elements. And there are twelve basketfuls of leftovers. One for every doubting disciple. And the hero of the day is the un-named young boy who was willing to share all he had.

Some of you may remember Pullman cars. Pullman made luxurious cars for those who wanted to ride trains first class. One the south side of Chicago, Pullman had a factory town where factory workers had everything they needed: homes, schools, churches, stores, etc. All was well until the Depression hit, and orders for fancy Pullman cars dwindled. The company let the workers remain in their homes, but soon their meager savings were used up buying groceries and other necessities.

Alice's little sister heard Alice softly crying in her bedroom. She asked, "What's the matter, Alice?" "Oh, I'm so ashamed of myself. I know Mom and Dad are doing everything they can. But I so wanted to go to Prom. Now a fancy dress is out of the question – I can't go in a school dress." And she resumed her sobbing. Her little sister retreated to her own room and took Alice's problems to God in prayer. When she was finished she opened her eyes and saw her own closet door open. And there was her own Confirmation dress from two years ago. Her parents had offered anything she wanted for the occasion, and she asked for that fancy dress...which was too small even for her. But she remembered that her mother used to sew their dresses. She went to her mother and explained Alice's problem and asked if she could take the fancy ribbons and bows from her dress and sew them onto one of her own Sunday dresses to make a prom dress for Alice. "What a wonderful idea!" her mother answered. "Let's keep it a secret until I'm done." And so Alice, and then her friends got prom dresses. And before it was over, closets were raided, sisters, cousins and aunts and grandmothers were all involved in "saving the prom." All because a little sister shared her confirmation dress.