

## SERMON “THE MIRACLE OF EIGHT—JESUS SATIFIES ALL”

(Matthew 14:13-21 Preached at MPC on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017)

In our gospel text for today, Jesus decides to withdraw by boat and sails to a deserted place where he could get away from all the stress and unpleasantness of the world—but the people found out where he was going and they came by the hundreds—and then by the thousands. Everyone wanted to see Jesus—to hear him—to touch him—to ask him for something. It was quite an honor for our Lord—unless you needed some time by yourself—time to think—time to pray—time to heal.

Jesus needed that kind of solitude, but it was not to be. Wherever he went, the crowds sought him out. On this day, the crowd was huge—five thousand men, Matthew says—plus women and children—maybe more like eight to ten thousand—we don't know the exact number only that the crowd was huge.

We would expect Jesus to be a little annoyed. He was looking for solitude, but ended up with a crowd. At some point, he surely wanted to say, "Leave me alone! For God's sake, go away!" That must have occurred to Jesus, but only for a moment. When he saw how needy they were, he had compassion on them. Matthew tells us that he cured their sick, in Greek that meaning is "wretched ones." When Jesus saw truly wretched people—people who desperately needed his healing touch he was filled with compassion. He focused his attention to those who needed him.

Jesus got so caught up in ministry that he failed to see that it was getting dark. His disciples noticed, however, and they came to talk to him. "Jesus, it's time to let these people go home," they said. "Time to let them find something to eat! It's getting late, Jesus, and people are hungry. Send them home." Note the tone of their voice. Most of the time, the disciples addressed Jesus as Lord. They treated him with respect. They deferred to him. But not here! Here they talked to him as if he were an absent-minded professor in need of a dose of reality. "It's getting late. The people are hungry." The disciples even tell Jesus what to do. "Send the people home so they can get something to eat."

But Jesus said, "They don't need to go away. **You** give them something to eat" (v. 16). The disciples looked at each other. "What are you talking about Jesus? There must be ten thousand people here. We don't have any food! We have nothing at all except five

loaves of bread and a couple of fish!" Jesus said, "Bring them here to me" (v. 18). Then he ordered the crowd to sit down, and he lifted his eyes to heaven—and he blessed the bread and broke it—and then he had the disciples distribute the bread and fish and everyone ate and everyone was filled. Thousands of them! And then the disciples collected the leftovers, which filled twelve baskets. There was more at the end than there was at the beginning. And Matthew says, "Those who ate were about five thousand men."

He also tells us that there were women and children present too. He wasn't trying to say that the women and children were unimportant but he was adding them at the end so that we might know that the crowd was twice as large as we had thought. We call this the Feeding of the Five Thousand, but it was actually the Feeding of the Ten Thousand.

You see, the disciples had assessed the situation correctly. The crowd was huge. It was late. They had only five small loaves and two fish. Five plus two equals seven. Seven bits of food that wouldn't feed the front row of this great crowd. "Send them home, Jesus," they urged. But there was something wrong with the disciples' math. They added five plus two and got seven—and concluded that there was no hope. I agree with one scholar Dale Bruner who said, "They should have counted to eight."

What that means is the disciples had forgotten the one most important reality—and that was Jesus. They had gotten their arithmetic right but their math wrong. They had added correctly and concluded wrongly. Five plus two adds up to seven. But their equation was wrong, because they forgot to include Jesus—I call this the miracle of eight! You see if you're involved in doing God's work and fail to include Jesus, you will always get the wrong answer.

Most of us like to think of ourselves as realistic people. We like to think that we face facts. We know how to add, subtract, multiply, and divide—some of us can do it in our heads without a calculator. We can get the numbers and tally the columns. BUT—and this is very important—BUT, if we are involved in a faith enterprise—and all of life is a faith enterprise by the way—if we are involved in a faith enterprise, we had better not forget the single most important part of our equation—and that is Jesus! Because Jesus transforms, magnifies, multiplies, everything he touches!

That means that when we walk with Christ and are doing His work with purpose, everything becomes possible. It doesn't matter if our bank account is empty. It doesn't matter if we reach in our pockets and find only lint. It doesn't matter that we are not especially smart—or talented—or beautiful—or charming. If Jesus is with us, the sky is the limit! That is the message of this story—“The miracle of eight—Jesus satisfies all!”

Look carefully at the menu that day and you will see that Jesus did not serve fillet of sole. There is no mention of a lovely Chardonnay to go with the fish. There was no green beans almandine. No dessert flambé. Jesus fed them bread, the most basic of foods. But all ate, and all were filled. They felt good. They were satisfied. They were happy. They weren't hungry anymore. That was quite a feat—a miracle for someone who started with only five small loaves and two fish!

The promise of this story is that if we humble ourselves, if we truly sit at Jesus' feet and feed on doing God's will, Jesus will provide what we need—even if the numbers don't add up. In fact, we can say that, if the numbers don't add up, it is because we have forgotten to put Jesus in the equation. We have added five plus two to get seven—when we needed to add five plus two—PLUS JESUS—to get eight. The stories of impossible possibilities among those who love Jesus are too many to mention—we don't have the time to hear all of them but I would like to share one with you.

Don Davis is a retired Presbyterian pastor who lives near San Diego. As a young man, Don seemed not to have many prospects. One of seven children born to a steel-worker and his wife, he was raised during the Great Depression in an area of southern Ohio known for poverty even in good times. Don's parents took the kids to church every Sunday. As Don saw the preacher standing in the pulpit, something stirred in him—a call to ministry? Jesus planted the idea in his heart that Don should be a minister one day. Don had a vague idea that ministers needed to go to college and seminary, but that was all he knew about ministers—except that he was going to be one someday.

What Don didn't know was with his family's current situation, it couldn't be done. He didn't understand that there was no money for college. He didn't realize that it was an impossible dream. He just knew that God had called him and that, somehow, he was going to be a minister. When Don started high school, shortly before the outbreak of World War II, he had to choose between a vocational track and a college-prep track. He chose the college-prep track, because he knew that he was going to study for the

ministry. When his father heard about it, he was furious. "Get those big ideas out of your head," he said. "You're not a rich kid! You have to realize what kind of family you are from!" It wasn't that Don's father was trying to be mean or even that he wasn't a man of faith. He was just doing what good fathers have always done—trying to protect and help put his son in touch with reality—trying to steer him away from certain failure. "Get in the vocational track," dad advised. "You have to get a job once you graduate from high school." Good advice right! Sensible! Or so it seemed. Five plus two adds up to seven—always. There were seven kids in Don's family—seven mouths to feed. However Don's father figured it, he came up with the number seven—and that meant that Don should forget college.

But Don stayed in the college-prep track. He wasn't trying to defy his father, but he knew that he was going to be a minister. He knew he was going to go to college. He didn't know how he was going to work it out—he just knew that somehow, with God's help, he would do it. Somehow, he understood that five plus two PLUS JESUS is an entirely different proposition. With Jesus in the equation, anything was possible—the miracle of eight!

Then during his last year of high school, Don's math teacher, Wade Carpenter, asked Don to stay after class one day. He told Don that the Navy had a program called the V-12 in which they sent qualified young men to college. That was news to Don. He had never heard of the V-12 program. Mr. Carpenter urged Don to apply, and even drove Don to the town where the Navy gave the exams. Don took the test, passed, and spent the next three years studying engineering at the University of South Carolina. After graduation, Don was commissioned as a Navy ensign, and spent the next year on the aircraft carrier Shangri-La. When he completed his active-duty obligation, he got out and went to seminary. He became an ordained Presbyterian pastor in 1951, and has been in ministry ever since. With Jesus, the impossible became possible—the dream became a reality! A couple of nice postscripts to this story!

Don's father was able to make the trip to South Carolina to attend Don's graduation and commissioning in 1946. Don walked across the stage in his Navy uniform and received his diploma from a university trustee. Then Admiral Nimitz presented him with his commission—the same Admiral Nimitz who had just won the naval war in the Pacific—Can you imagine how astonished Don's father must have been! How glad and proud he must have been that Don had not taken his advice!

And then, a few years later, Don was driving down Highway 30 in Oregon—half a continent away from the place where he had gone to high school. As he passed a truck stop, he glanced over and saw a man who looked like Wade Carpenter. He stopped, and sure enough, it was his old math teacher. They spent a couple of hours talking about all the things that had happened since the day that Carpenter had driven Don to the Navy exam—and Don finally had a chance to say thanks!

This past Saturday we had our first church planning retreat in a few years—the main emphasis was on gaining a basic understanding of the Purpose Driven Church model and the benefits of adapting those principles, processes, and methods to re-imagine MPC in terms of that model—we broke into small groups and focused on 4 questions based on the video we watched, and ended that session with a discussion to see the way ahead in the purposed driven process.

Right now, I want to thank personally and give high praise to our PDC team, John T, Trang, Russell Malone and Margie Lee with the investment of their time, talents, and resources on making that retreat a success—and I want to thank all those who came and invested their gifts of “time” and support to the retreat, and of course our ever-faithful fellowship hosts Bill and Cheryl Horton for their support.

In that opening two minute video you just watched by Pastor Rick Warren who said, “There is no organizational chart in the Bible and that is intentional! Because it allows the church to adapt at every age, every stage, and every culture! Rick continues, “Hell would be if God could show me what I could have accomplished for Christ’s life if I had just believed Him a little bit more.”

Friends, I’m believing and asking you to believe Jesus a little bit more with me—believe in the miracle of the eight right now! If you haven’t read the book yet or the notes prepared by Trang Malone on the intro, Part I and II, please consider making that commitment. With renewed hope, our PDC team and those who attended the retreat along with our session’s approval, we will all unite in a timely decision to take MPC to the next level in the PDC process.

As Jesus asked his disciples first, “You feed them”—I’m asking you to help feed our church and adapt it to a new model. A model that will insure healthy growth in the 5

God purposes of our church— let's make sure our math and numbers add up! Just as we need good health insurance to maintain our physical bodies, I believe it's critical for the health of our church to take a good look at what the Saddleback experience has to offer us in terms of providing Godly principles for a purposeful healthy and growing church. Let's add Jesus to the equation of 5 and 2 plus one which equals eight! Let the miracle feeding begin! In Jesus name! Amen!