

Streetsville United Church  
Sunday, October 7, 2007  
Rev. John Tapscott

"FROM THANKSGIVING TO MIRACLE"

John 6:11

Sometimes God's Holy Spirit reveals something new in a very familiar Biblical story. It happened to me this summer as I read the story in John chapter six of Jesus taking five loaves and two fish and feeding 5000 people on a Galilean hillside.

Jesus went to the other side of the Sea to spend time alone with the disciples. But crowds followed, hoping to see or receive more of his healing miracles. And Jesus' thoughts turned to the peoples' basic physical needs, because they might staying for a while. Jesus knew what he would do, but asked, "How are we going to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" Philip shrugged and said, "We would need a years' wages to feed this crowd." Andrew said, "Here is a lad who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what's that among so many?" Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." So five thousand sat down on the grass. Now here in verse 11 is something I had never really seen before. "Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted." What I saw was the central role of thanksgiving in the miracle. "When he had given thanks, he distributed them." From thanksgiving to miracle.

John underlines the importance of Jesus' thanksgiving later in chapter six. The next day boats came to the place of the miracle, full of people hoping to get a free lunch or to witness another miraculous sign. Verse 23, "Boats from Tiberias came near the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks..." John not only says that Jesus fed the multitude, but stresses that it

occurred after "the Lord had given thanks." "Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them." Jesus' action reveals some central truths about thanksgiving.

The first is to give God thanks for what he has already provided. The disciples focussed on the inadequate provision. But Jesus knew the boy with five loaves and two fish was there by God's providence. And he gave thanks for God had already provided.

Paul says, "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God for you." Now we don't thank God for every circumstance, but in every circumstance we discover that God has provided resources for our use and blessing. There is always something to be thankful for. When Robinson Crusoe was shipwrecked he drew up a ledger and set down the bad points and the good points in his situation. On the bad side he placed, "I am cast up on a desolate island with no hope of recovery." On the good: "I am not dead like everyone else who was on that ship." On the bad side, "There is no one to help me." On the good: "The ship is beached close enough to land so that I can retrieve many of her supplies." Bad side: "I have no clothes." Good side: "It's hot and I don't need any." Bad side: "I have no gun to shoot animals that would eat me." Good side: "There aren't any animals that would eats me."

If we look we always see resources to help and bless us - physical resources, spiritual resources, people resources. I look around the church and think about people who missing, and wonder how to get them back. But I have to remember to first thank God for the faithful people he brings here week by week. God never leaves us empty handed. God is the great provider. And he usually provides far more than five loaves and two fish. God has created a bountiful world with enough for everyone's need, if not everyone's greed. Psalm 50:10 says that God "owns the cattle upon a thousand hills." Give thanks to God for what he has already provided, as Jesus did.

A mother felt her budget stretched every month. Only by

careful spending and budgeting could she pay her bills and provide for her children. Some months it didn't seem like she would have enough. But every month there was enough, and rather than griping about what she didn't have, she learned to be grateful for the loaves and fishes that were faithfully provided.

And what about us who know that we will have more than we need month by month? Well, that gives us an opportunity to be generous. We can share not just the left-over, but first-fruits, so that others may share in God's bounty. The first truth of thanksgiving is to give God thanks for what he has already provided.

"Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, distributed them..." Here's the second. Giving thanks for what God has already provided opens the way for God's greater work in us and among us. Jesus gave thanks for five loaves and two fish, and by God's power they were multiplied so that all ate and were satisfied. Thanksgiving led to miracle.

Now giving God thanks doesn't mean that such a great miracle will always happen. But thanking God for his provision does open a channel for God to do something more. Jesus healed ten lepers but something greater happened to the one who returned to give thanks. Jesus said to him: "Get up and be on your way; your faith has brought you salvation." The man was healed in body *and* in soul.

You see, gratitude is very much like faith. It's a sign that we are trusting God and so opens a way for God to do an even greater work in us and among us. What that work will be is up to God, but we can be sure that something will happen.

I have been trying something recently. When I pray with someone I begin by thanking God for what he has already provided in that person's situation. Everything I can think of in a minute I thank God for - his love and faithfulness, for hearing prayers, for the forgiveness and hope we have in Christ, for the love that will never let us go, for the person's faith, for family and friends and

helpers. I thank God for these things first, then I pray about the person's health or family situation or whatever. After praying like that I feel much more at peace and I hope it's true for the person I'm praying for. Certainly a door has been opened for God's further work in the person's life, perhaps in mine, too. Thanking God for what he has already provided opens the way for God's even greater work in us and among us. It's the Biblical order.

Could this be the key to making our churches places where God's Spirit moves in a mighty way? Gertrude Behenna was 53 years old when Christ found her and saved her from a destructive life-style. As a new Christian she was eager to attend church and talk with enthusiastic people who had known the grace and love of God for years. But what she discovered was "Bowed heads, long faces, and funereal whispers... as I attended churches in various parts of the country, I discovered long-faced, listless people present in every congregation...how could they come into God's presence every Sunday without breathing in the joy that danced in the very air?"

If we sometimes wonder why God's presence and power are not more evident in our churches, perhaps it's because we are not spending enough time praising and thanking Him. A congregation could be transformed by greater emphasis on praise and thanksgiving. Thanking God for what he has already provided opens the way for God's greater work in us and among us.

"Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, distributed them..." The third truth of thanksgiving is this. Give thanks to God for Jesus Christ who is the Bread of Life.

John chapter 6 is centred on Jesus' words in verse 35. When the crowds caught up to Jesus on the other side of the Sea, He said to them, "I am the Bread of life; whoever comes to me shall never hunger; whoever believes in me shall never thirst." Of course, Jesus was concerned for the physical needs of the people. But Jesus came to do more than to just fill our bellies with bread. He came

from heaven to be the spiritual bread we all need.

The Japanese say that humans have two stomachs. One can be with filled rice or bread. But we also have an invisible stomach that must be filled with the invisible gifts of God. And when we try to fill our spiritual stomachs with more bread, we still feel empty. But Jesus Christ, by his incarnate life, his atoning death on the Cross, and his resurrection victory is the one who fills our second stomach, our soul, with the presence and power of Almighty God. And Christ does just that for everyone who believes in him and feeds on him by faith. Jesus Christ gives us purpose, he brings us forgiveness and peace; he drives out our deepest fears by his love; he gives us eternal life. The presence of Christ in our lives satisfies our deepest longings. He is the bread of life.

A tax assessor came one day to a devout Christian man to determine the amount of tax he owed. "What property do you own?" asked the assessor. "I am a wealthy man," replied the Christian. "List your possessions, please," said the assessor. "Well, he said, I have everlasting life, John 3: 16. I have a mansion in heaven, John 14:2. I have peace that passes understanding, Philippians 4:7. I have unspeakable joy, 1 Peter 1:8. I have divine love which never fails, 1 Corinthians 13:8. I have a precious, faithful wife, Proverbs 31:10. I have happy, obedient children, Exodus 20:12. I have true, loyal friends, Proverbs 18:24. I have songs in the night, Psalms 42:8. Plus, I have the crown of life, James 1:12." The tax assessor closed his book and said, "Yes, indeed you are a rich man, and your property is not subject to taxation."

Friends, as the bank ad puts it, we're richer than we think. But our riches come through faith in Christ. They are true riches, beyond price and beyond taxation. So let us join in faith with Christians around the world today at the Holy Supper, giving thanks for the blessings God provides and for the opportunities to share them. Above all, let us give God thanks for Jesus Christ, the Bread of life. And let us watch for God's great work in us and among us.

Jesus taught his followers not to worry about what they would eat

or drink or wear, because their heavenly Father knows that we need all these things.

John says that the Passover, the Feast of the Jews, was at hand. People should have been streaming to Jerusalem for the Feast, but instead they were coming to Jesus. Something very significant was going on, indeed.

God provides not for everyone's greed, but for everyone's need.