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“Food for Thought”

John 6:24-35; Ephesians 4:1-7

I'd like to first say how glad how I am to be BACK... only because I was so glad to LEAVE. Don't take it personally. We all need those times of refreshing to be with family, to enjoy different surroundings, to take time away from the routine of our daily responsibilities and challenges. And the time afforded Barrie and I helps to recharge those batteries than can get so run down. And as I've come to appreciate with my aging cellphone (like its owner!), it can become quite frustrating to operate with a depleted energy source. It's pretty hard to function when you're running on empty. Like our phones, we reach a point where we simply 'shut down'...

In the weeks I was gone, I understand that you all considered the miracle of the Feeding of the 5000. By virtue of it being the ONLY miracle of Jesus to be found in ALL 4 Gospels, we can deduce that it MUST be pretty important. Well of course it is: it relates to FOOD! Here in S. LA. We can certainly appreciate the importance of food, which we derive so much pleasure from it could be considered like baseball... our 'favorite pastime'. Be it for the *flavor* or the *fellowship*, **eating** is important to us for much more than physiological reasons.

In this miraculous feeding story, it was NOT about how the bread and fish were prepared, however. Deep-fried or blackened were NOT options. It was more about *survival*. About meeting physical needs. The people's hunger was REAL. And Jesus' provided for those needs in 'real,' tangible ways. By God's blessing through Him, a little became a lot. Those 5 loaves and 2 fishes became 'the gifts that kept on giving.' As they witnessed how Jesus miraculously provided for their needs by filling their hungry stomachs, it only made the people's *minds* more 'hungry' to know more about HOW he did it. And how they too might share in this miracle-working power. In the words of v. 28, **“What must we do to perform the works of God?”** (John 6:28)

As they saw this mysterious **man** of God exhibit such power, the people were reminded of their great patriarch Moses, who also called upon God on behalf of a hungry group of people.

No doubt some of them saw Jesus in this same role: a faithful man of God empowered by that God to do great things. But a MAN nonetheless. As their obedience to the man Moses resulted in blessings from God, so would their obedience to this 'man' Jesus do the same.

And herein lies the core of what John's gospel is intended to communicate to believers both ancient and modern. Jesus is not merely a 'good, Godly man.' But rather, God MADE man. God in human flesh. ***"In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God."*** (John 1:1)

Jesus... God **incarnate**... God 'in human form'... in no way diminishes His DIVINE nature. HOW do those two natures co-exist? That's why they call it a holy mystery. What matters most is not the 'how'... but the 'who.' How did Jesus multiply those loaves and fishes. Don't ask me. What's important is 'WHO' did it. In this story, Jesus makes it clear that this experience is NOT merely about the physical manifestation of God's providence... but the spiritual reality, the GIFT, of God's presence. It's not so much about the FACTS of the story... but the FAITH of the story. It's not only about believing in a miracle... but a miracle **Worker!**

That is why when those seekers of knowledge and power ask ***"What must we do to perform the works of God?"*** Jesus answers, ***"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."*** (John 6:29) Our blessings from God do not simply come out of our obedience to his will. Our lives are not simply a matter of 'Do Good, Get Good.' That was the old covenant of **works**. The new covenant, under which we are called to live by this Book, is the covenant of **grace**. That our good works should flow out of our faith in God... nothing we can earn or work for, but are ours by God's grace alone. There's an old saying, 'It's not WHAT you know, but WHO you know.' The importance of having 'connections.' Jesus also spoke to the importance of such connectedness:

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

'Job 1' in the 'work of God' is to believe in the One He has sent... as we remain 'grafted' in Him, we will bear much fruit. But apart from Him we can do nothing...

Which brings me to Paul's words relative to that 'fruit' that we are to bear. The Great Apostle implores his fellow followers... 'BEGS' us... to ***"lead a life worthy of the calling to which***

we have been called." (Eph. 4:1) NO SMALL REQUEST! How many of us would be willing to say (either out loud or to ourselves) that this week we have 'led a life *worthy* of God's calling?' How well have you fulfilled Paul's directives relative to that 'worthiness': ***"...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."*** (Eph. 4:2-3) Oh sure, you've probably done pretty well with those nice folks in the nursing home, civic organization, or at the beauty parlor, or in your men's group, or bridge club or S.S. class... but how about when you turn on the news... or get on the internet? When discussions turn political, and you find yourself turning 'red'... or 'blue'... in the face? ☺ How about with that defiant teenager, difficult co-worker, determined client, defensive service technician? When you are faced with trying situations, do the words 'humility,' 'gentleness,' 'patience' 'bearing with one another in love' come to mind... and lips? In a nation, and world, so divided, how are you and I ***"making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"***?

As I spoke earlier of that response of Jesus to those who sought to do the same 'works' that He did... ***"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent"***... I would imagine that most of you could have replied (at least mentally, in silence, if not verbally, aloud), 'Well sure, I believe in Jesus, whom God sent to us.' Well, we should always consider just what it really means to 'believe.' That to really believe in Christ, we must TRUST in Him. Trust that just as he provided for those hungry, hurting, helpless folks on a hillside, so too will He **provide** for us. Trust that he can take whatever meager 'loaves and fishes' of time, talents, and treasures we have and **multiply** them in **miraculous** ways. Trust in Christ enough that your life, and mine, will be **testimony** to Him: by ***"leading a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called."*** A life of **humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another in love, unity and peace...**

The miraculous feeding of the 5000 (which would have been, in truth, many more than that) was much more than **physical food**... but to nourish the **spiritual faith** of those hungry, thirsty families. It was not simply to **exhibit** God's **power**... but to **experience** God's **presence**. To **believe**... and **trust**... To bear **testimony** in word and deed... in the Christ who is every faithful in 'feeding' us in mind, body, and spirit. The Jesus who promises to us, ***"I am the bread***

of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6:35)

I would leave you with words of Jesus to His disciples when faced with those who were quite hungry and thirsty: ***“You give them something to eat.”*** You too will encounter those this week who are also ‘hungry’ and ‘thirsty.’ Perhaps physically... or spiritually. How will YOU ‘give them something to eat?’ Will you offer them ‘the bread of life?’ How would YOU answer the question: *“What must I do to perform the works of God?”* Just thought I’d give YOU some **‘Food... for Thought’...**