



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Seventh Sunday After Trinity, Sunday, July 23rd, 2007

✠ **In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. AMEN** ✠

The Feeding of the Four Thousand (subject of today's Communion Gospel) – like the Feeding of the Five Thousand – is a prophetic miracle, rich with symbolism. These two miracles of feeding, above all, affirm Jesus Christ's promise of the continued sustenance of his Body and Blood in his institution of the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

These two miracles were no less symbolic for the population of the Holy Land in the First Century AD. Many of them saw these two miracles as proof positive of Jesus' messiahship. Just as God had miraculously fed their ancestors with manna in the wilderness, so his Messiah had fed them by miraculously multiplying a couple of loaves and a few small fish. It confirmed the fact that he was a worthy successor to Moses, the most illustrious of all the Jewish people's forebears.

It is possible – indeed, probable – these weren't Jesus' only miracles of feeding. The Gospels by no means contain an exhaustive account of all the miracles and wonders Jesus performed. It is reasonable to assume they merely amount to a thumbnail of his doings and sayings.

This is not merely idle speculation. St. John tells us in concluding his Gospel: "There are also many other things which Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."

In any event, Jesus' miracles of feeding were well known throughout the Holy Land – so well known, in fact, that people routinely asked him to repeat them. St. Mark tells us, for example, that after the Feeding of the Four Thousand, a group of Pharisees, intrigued by stories about the miracle, interrogated our Lord about it and demanded he repeat it for them.

Mark tells us they were “testing” Jesus – demanding he prove he was the messiah. No doubt they were looking for an opportunity to figure out how he performed his “magic tricks” and expose him as a phony. In the unlikely event, he turned out to be genuine after all, it would be quite awesome – not to mention entertaining – to witness a miracle at first hand and to taste food that God himself had made.

There's something amazingly arrogant about such an attitude – trying to play the restaurant critic with God's cooking. But this group of Pharisees wouldn't be the first people to treat God as entertainment and they certainly wouldn't be the last. Throughout human history, there have always been people who are more interested in what they, themselves, can get out of worship services than in glorifying God.

Jesus, of course, knew immediately what the Pharisees were up to and sent them away with a flea in their ear. But when he got back to the boat in which he and the disciples were traveling, he found them all hot and bothered about the fact that – despite all the food left over from the Feeding of the Four Thousand – nobody had brought anything aboard the vessel to eat but one solitary loaf of bread.

“Beware the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of the Herodians,” he told the disciples jokingly. He was warning not to behave like the fundamentalist Pharisees with their nit-picking, legalism and hypocrisy or to ape the cynical worldly ways of the Herodian secularists – the folks who didn't believe the Jewish religion should play any serious role in the nation's public life.

But the disciples were so caught up in their row over the lack of food they thought Jesus was talking about the sort of bread they should buy. They interpreted his words as a warning not to shop at Pharisee and gentile bakeries, and instead to look round for a place run by religious moderates. Instead of realizing Jesus was quite

capable of providing for their every need, they kept bickering about how to do the marketing.

It is something one sees time and again in the Gospels: Folks missing the point of what Jesus had said and ignoring the implication of the miracles he performed. The miracles were taken for granted. Instead of pondering the awesome nature of the acts of creation in the miracles he performed -- the implications of Jesus' ability to heal and raise people from the dead -- folks simply got on with their own agendas. If they thought about the miracles at all, it was simply to figure out how they fit in with their own political plans.

When we, with the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, look back at their behavior, we are often puzzled and sometimes not a little contemptuous. How could they have been so stupid? How could they have been so blind? But the fact of the matter is that we are guilty of exactly the same foolishness -- in slightly different ways, naturally.

No doubt Jesus gets as frustrated with us as he did with his disciples: "How come you're thinking about bread?" he asked, "How come you perceive nothing? How come you don't understand? Have you got eyes that don't see and ears that don't hear? Don't you remember anything?"

The disciples just looked at him blankly. "When I broke the five loaves and fed five thousand people with them, how many baskets of leftovers did you collect up afterwards?" he asked. "Twelve," they answered.

"And just now," he went on, "When I divided the seven loaves among the four thousand people, how many basketsful of leftovers did you gather up?" "Seven," they replied. "How come you don't understand what this is all about?" he said, exasperatedly.

One of the things that should have struck the disciples is that Jesus performed the miracles of feeding on his own account. He didn't ask permission from any "higher authority." He simply said: "I feel very sorry for all those people. They have been

with me three days and now have nothing to eat. If I send them home fasting, they will faint from hunger on the way.” And he proceeded to do something about it.

If the disciples had devoted any genuine effort to pondering what was happening before their eyes they might have concluded that the acts of creation they were witnessing were of the same order, in microcosm, as the creation of the universe. They might further have concluded that as only God has such powers, and as Jesus was clearly exercising them on his own authority, they were in the very presence of God. But this doesn't seem to have occurred to them or any of the Holy Land's religious leaders.

The problem is that they simply weren't prepared to meet God as he really is. They ignored what the revelation given to us in the very first chapter of Genesis: “God created man in his own image, the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.” They expected God to conform to their image of him. Sadly, it is a fault we all share – we forgot who it is created who. *AMEN*

To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.