

SO THEY SAT DOWN, ABOUT FIVE THOUSAND IN ALL

Communion. The Grace of God is unlimited. Our tiny bit of bread and sip of wine are limitless gifts of God. There is more than enough Grace for hungry souls.

Please Study Isaiah 25 ⁶⁻⁸ On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. [© NRSV]

Cultural Notes

1) *Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?"*

Baking was a weekly communal effort. The village women brought their raised dough and gathered by a beehive stove. They visited while the family bread baked. No small villages could possibly feed 5000 guests, let alone 100!.

2) *....a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish.*

The young boy, in a burst of charity, hands his lunch over to Jesus. It consists of five barley loaves and two fish. Barley loaves are the bread of the poor. The fish are tiny, presumably dried fish snacks, like sardines. Jesus turns the boy's lunch into a banquet for many.

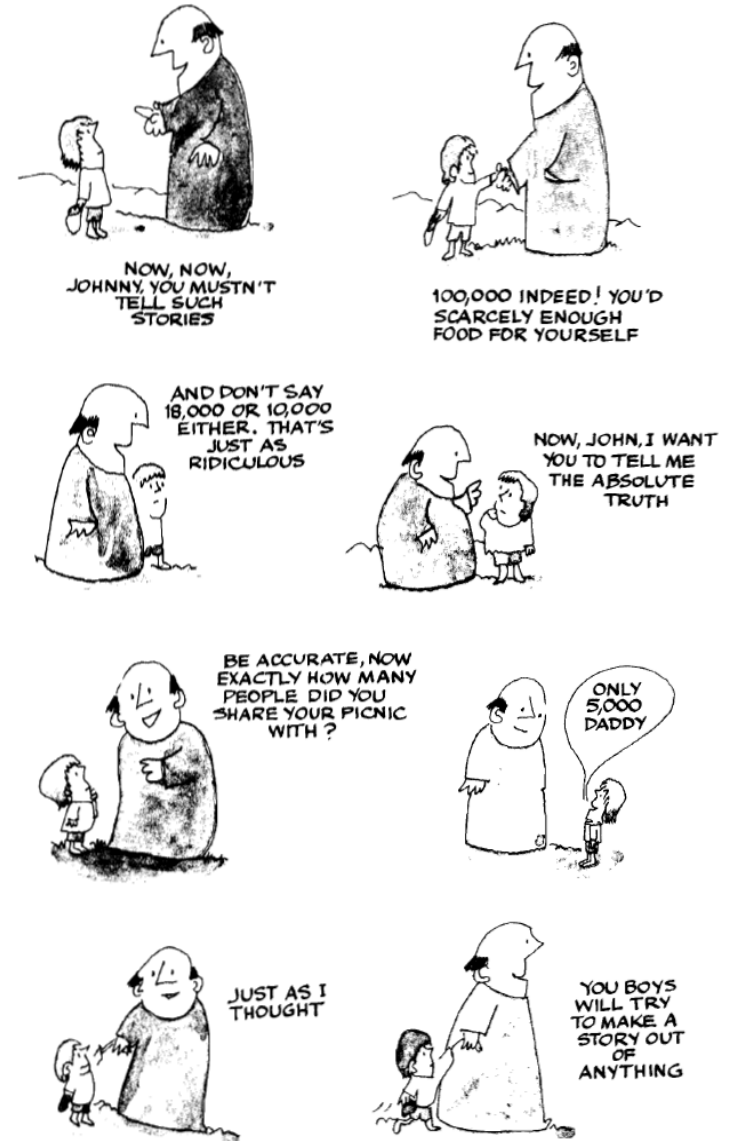
3) *Jesus said, "Make the people sit down [Literally: reclined]."*

Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down [Literally: reclined], about five thousand in all.

People of Roman Empire normally reclined when they ate, especially at feasts. Jesus wants the meal to model the great banquet as in Isaiah above..

Please prepare John 6:24-35 for next Sunday.

SO THEY SAT DOWN, ABOUT FIVE THOUSAND IN ALL



The Barnabas Bible

Jeffrey, G., Harper and Row, 1973, page 168

Today's Gospel: Saint John 6:1-21

✠ JESUS WENT TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SEA OF GALILEE, ALSO called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. 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. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve **baskets** (Greek: κοφίνους ko **phi** nous, *see page 3*). When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.” When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself. When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going. [© NRSV]

The Primary Miracle of the New Testament

You may recall from last week's insert that the Feeding of the Multitude appears more often than any New Testament event. It is found six (or perhaps seven) times in the Gospels. Mark and

Matthew both tell it twice in the feeding first of the 5000 and then of the 4000. Luke and John each record one feeding of 5000. And the possible seventh? In his last chapter John notes that Jesus fed a bread and fish breakfast to seven of the Apostles following their miraculous catch of 153 large fish, (to the ancients, a *very* significant number which deserves its own brief homily.¹ The Apostles are given a symbolic lesson of their job and our job too: we and they are to bring the world’s peoples to Christ.

No story excepting the Incarnation/Resurrection/Ascension/Coming of the Holy Spirit was more important to the life of the early (Jewish-Christian) Church. Consider Isaiah, 25⁶⁻⁸ (see box, below, p. 4), Isaiah 55^{1 ff.} and the poetic couplets below, Isaiah 65^{13 ff.}, wherein God assures his faithful that they, unlike the faithless, will not be hungry.

Isaiah 65:¹³⁻¹⁴ Therefore thus says the Lord God:
My servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry;
my servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty;
my servants shall rejoice, but you shall be put to shame;
my servants shall sing for gladness of heart,
but you shall cry out for pain of heart,
and shall wail for anguish of spirit. [© NRSV]

κοφίνους

So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. κοφίνους ko **phi** nous.

The Greek word κοφίνους appears in all 4 accounts of the Feeding of the 5000, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The Gospel writers are in agreement that a large amount of food remained after the crowd had had their full of Jesus’ bounty.² The word is a cognate with our English word, *coffin*. The idea is that the generosity of God knows no bounds. There is more than enough food for all the hungry souls, twelve coffins full! This understanding finds a ready home in our Eucharistic concept of the gift of Holy

¹ According to a now lost but well attested document, the ancient Greek zoologists believed that there were 153 species of fish in the world.

² A large stock of food remains too in both feedings of the 4000, but a different word is used. Those feedings happened in Gentile lands. The word for the container there is *spuridos* (spur i dos), a basket that Jews used to carry Kosher food when in Gentile territory so that they could eat undefiled.