

Fed by Grace | Food in the Gospels

Feeding the Crowds, Forming the Twelve

Luke 9.10-27

1.26.14

When the apostles returned, they gave an account to Him of all that they had done. Taking them with Him, He withdrew by Himself to a city called Bethsaida. ¹¹ But the crowds were aware of this and followed Him; and welcoming them, He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing. ¹² Now the day was ending, and the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the crowd away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place." ¹³ But He said to them, "You give them something to eat!" And they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people." ¹⁴ (For there were about five thousand men.) And He said to His disciples, "Have them sit down to eat in groups of about fifty each." ¹⁵ They did so, and had them all sit down. ¹⁶ Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and broke them, and kept giving them to the disciples to set before the people. ¹⁷ And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets full. ¹⁸ And it happened that while He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him, and He questioned them, saying, "Who do the people say that I am?" ¹⁹ They answered and said, "John the Baptist, and others say Elijah; but others, that one of the prophets of old has risen again." ²⁰ And He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered and said, "The Christ of God." ²¹ But He warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone, ²² saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day." ²³ And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. ²⁴ "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. ²⁵ "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? ²⁶ "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. ²⁷ "But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."

We're looking at the "source documents" of the Christian faith... the accounts of the life of Jesus Christ called "Gospels": the Good News according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

And we're especially focused on the theme of FOOD, how food is often used as a symbol or illustration in the teaching of Jesus Christ AND how food brings people together and Jesus speaks and relates to people and does some of His most provocative teaching at these dinner parties and gatherings.

Today, one of the most famous of all the food-events in the Gospels, all four accounts include this event, The Feeding of the 5000. Jesus Christ is often invited for lunch or dinner (sometimes

they try to HAVE Him for lunch...to trap or embarrass Him) but here, HE is hosting the event. He is welcoming the crowds and providing the food and organizing the seating arrangements...He's having a few guests to His house for dinner...AND... the Twelve.

In fact, this mention of the word "apostles" in the opening words on this text, THIS marks a kind of shift in the methodology of Jesus Christ and He begins to deliberately zero-in on these twelve students or disciples or apostles. The Rabbi is wasting a lot of time with these ruffians – they're like the New Sons of Jacob. Jesus Christ is the New Israel and they are the heads of the New Tribes...SO...He hammers them and shapes them and everything He does seems to involve their development. He's "discipling" them.

And that's what I want to talk about TODAY – YOUR DISCIPLESHIP. How's that going? Are you seeing any changes in your spiritual life? Are you growing, maturing, deepening, making any strides? Are you seeing any new truths or richer understandings? How is the Kingdom of God affecting your relationships with God, family, church members and those in your daily routine? Do you see yourself as a disciple?

Let's look at these two scenes and I'll organize the story – 1) Juxtaposition 2) Catalyst 3) Eye-Contact

Juxtaposition is a literary device where two things are placed side by side for the purpose of highlighting the similarities or differences of the things... The point of this juxtaposition seems to be the disciple's FAILURE...followed by their SUCCESS.

There's a tremendous failure of faith in the first scene and then a miraculous break-through of faith in the second scene. At the start of the chapter, Jesus Christ sent out the twelve, "and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. And ... to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing." (1-2)

And they were told to go with NO PROVISIONS for the journey – as if they were entering the Promised Land and God would provide EVERYTHING. They could take no money, no food, no luggage, not even a second coat...Total reliance on Him as the One who called them and on God's Spirit going before them.

And they come back ELATED at how God used them to display His Kingdom – healing and truth and liberation and good triumphing over evil everywhere they went. Like the land flowing with milk and honey!

Then they go on a retreat with the Rabbi to celebrate the IN-BREAKING of God's Kingdom...but... they're discovered. And these massive crowds are pursuing Jesus Christ to be healed and helped. And He hosts them; He welcomes the crowds (Matt/Mk – "felt compassion for them")...And now it's the end of a long day and the crowds are so immense 5000 men (may have been just the "men"!) and the Apostles are a little at-wit's-end and a little (alright A LOT!) overwhelmed and

they say, "Say the benediction! Let's call it a day! SEND THE CROWDS AWAY...we're in the wilderness and we gotta' give these people time to find food and shelter!"

And, in what strikes ME as ...I dunno...a little ...abrupt, Jesus says, "YOU give them something to eat!"

Why did He do that? Why does He seem sort of stern or confrontational with His disciples? What really did He want them to do? And why would we call this a "faith failure"? I mean what would YOU do?

Well, John, in His account specifies that it was Philip. "He said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?' And this He was saying to test Philip; for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive even a little."

One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, 'There's a little boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?'" (John 6.5-9)

So, it was a TEST...and He was planning to ACT but apparently wants them to feel something...to perhaps feel the overwhelming NEED of the crowds of a world teeming with people...sheep without a shepherd...and WANTS them to feel how ridiculously puny they are to help people...never mind great crowds...hundreds...thousands...5000 men and maybe many more women and children...and IN THE WILDERNESS...to feel a sense of inadequacy and even despair...because ONLY in that soil can faith begin to germinate...to sprout...and grow.

They have NO faith (they're unbelieving believers!) – and He is creating an environment where faith can be born... BUT... why do they have no faith?

Even with the big crowds and the scary wilderness and the encroaching darkness...hadn't they seen His miracles (at least eight major specified miracles thus far in Luke!) ...hadn't they just seen God miraculously provide? They'd seen God heal by their own rough fisherman hands...BUT already they are ONCE AGAIN...failing to believe...that HE would act ...and would display the beauty of God's Kingdom!

A failure to believe...

And then, in the next scene, JUXTAPOSED, a break-through of belief. "Who do people say that I am? Some say John the Baptist or Elijah or an ancient prophet risen again... And YOU? Who do YOU say that I am?"

And Peter answers for them all! "The Christ of God!" It's spoken directly and with certainty. You get the idea that the other men were nodding in agreement as if to say, "Yeah! Definitely!" In the other accounts Jesus Christ says, "flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father

who is in heaven.” In other words, this is NOT a conclusion you could draw on your own...It is given by God and it is received as a gift BY faith!”

Side by side...juxtaposed...one catastrophic crisis of faith, a FAILURE TO BELIEVE and immediately an astounding, miraculous FLIGHT OF FAITH...a revelation received by FAITH. AND the question is...HOW?

What was the catalyst or the cause...how did they go from depths of doubt to the heights of miraculous confidence and rest...from failure to faith...HOW DID IT HAPPEN...what made the difference?

Well, it could've been the feeding of the 5000. At the end there are 12 baskets full of left-overs – that's not accidental! This is the new Israel and TWELVE new tribes...and each disciple sees it HIMSELF!

Maybe this was the miracle that “tipped the scales” from unbelief to faith...finally enough evidence!

Maybe they see that THIS is the Kingdom...healing ... feeding ...liberating ... That Jesus is beyond the Law; no emphasis of legal restrictions in this eating – it's just indiscriminate/unconditional and goes to everyone (whether they wash their hands or not – whether clean or unclean) and IT'S NOT A FUNDRAISER! No one is asked to pay for the food! It's mercy NOT MERIT...and all those LEFTOVERS! Maybe it forced them to conclude – this is NOT the “do this and live” way of the Law. This is the lavish free, ridiculously generous way of grace and the Kingdom come!

And all those ...were certainly dawning on the disciples... but... this was MORE than just adding up the evidence and drawing the right conclusion. There's a catalyst at work...something mystical... a hidden, behind-the-scenes agent working to change the hearts and EYES of the disciples...

You could easily miss it...but I think it's found in these simple words, “And it happened that while He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him and He asked them, ‘Who do people say that I am?’”

“WHILE HE WAS PRAYING ALONE...” He was praying and He was praying for THEM...and that's the factor the catalyst that sparked the evidence and led to that amazing conclusion, “YOU are the Christ of God!”

This is Jesus Christ forming the souls of those in His care, His students, His disciples. He takes them on field trips. He sends them on missions. He lives in front of them. He teaches. He puts them in hard spots and then pushes them (“YOU give them to eat!”)...and then...HE PRAYS FOR THEM...and there's a spiritual reaction, a breakthrough, the turning point in the whole narrative.

And THEN...as soon as the reaction takes place and they make this conclusion...AS SOON AS THEY RIGHTLY LABEL the container... "THIS IS MESSIAH". Then immediately, always moving them ahead, He says, "Next Lesson is called, 'What IS a Messiah?'"

You labeled the Container correctly ("You are the Christ") but now we have to look at the content of the Container and we'll find that you really don't know what a Messiah or a Christ IS! You have all kinds of strange ideas about what I've come to do..."

As soon as they pass Test #1 the teacher "warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone, saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day."

Don't tell anyone that I'm the Christ because you really don't know that IS...But I'm going to go to work on that ...Let's begin with the BIG IDEA that I have come to live and die IN YOUR PLACE. I've come to obey for you...and to suffer for your disobedience. I've come to de-fang the powers of darkness and that can only be done by My death and resurrection.

They don't have any compartments in their understanding for a Christ who suffers but that's the next LONG UNIT in their discipleship.

Now when you think of your own spiritual life... my guess is that MOST of the people here today consider themselves Christians. The question is, "Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ?"

And you may be quick to respond, "Well, I was always taught that every Christian is a disciple" AND THAT IS ABSOLUTELY TRUE. But some people who think of themselves as Christians... who may even be in church regularly really have VERY little idea what it means to be under the spiritual direction and the shaping hand of Jesus Christ, to BE HIS DISCIPLE.

Even though there are only 12 Apostles, every Christian is enrolled in the school of Jesus Christ. He is the perfect Teacher. His prayers are the catalyst that bring spiritual truth to life...that kindle rules and obligations and doctrines INTO A BLAZE within us.

He is always at work in every Christian and if YOU really are a believer (even though you may be weak in faith ...failing in faith...an unbelieving believer) but if Jesus Christ has taken you into His school, HE IS RENOVATING YOU...Just like He did to the Twelve.

And in this passage, if you could picture it on the big screen...with the main character instructing His Twelve disciples...He's like a Potter forming their hearts and like a Sculptor chipping away and bringing beauty from the block of stone...and then...the Artist turns...away from the Twelve and He looks right INTO THE CAMERA...right into your eyes...FROM THE CROWDS...to the TWELVE and then RIGHT INTO YOUR EYES "And He was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever

wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?

Jesus Christ is saying, “You must fall hard into My hands...must die to your other options. Your other allegiances must all be secondary and AS THE DISCIPLE DESPAIRED OF FEEDING the crowds, YOU TOO must see the ridiculous inadequacy of other avenues... Your kids can’t save you ...your singleness ...your professional achievements/reputation ... your money... your mind...your looks/desirability...your determination...all these will fail you. Even if they win you awards and accolades ...even if they win you the whole world...they will cost you YOUR VERY SELF.

Fall hard into my Artist Hands and I will kill you and raise you up again...new and glorious like you could NEVER have imagined. Give up yourself – to Me – and you will find who you really are...Hold yourself back from me and you will never become your True Self.

C.S. Lewis closes Mere Christianity with these words: *“Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favourite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end...Nothing that you have not given away will be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.”*

“Whoever wants to save his life will lose it...but whoever loses it to Me will save it”.....it’s the voice of Jesus Christ speaking to the heart of the disciple. Do you hear Him speaking into the camera as it were – speaking OFF THE page and into YOUR LIFE? Don’t be afraid of His paradox (to die...to deny yourself is to live, is to find yourself) To hold on to our dreams and wants and to cling to our 5 barley loaves is to miss the miracle...is to refuse the painful renovation that ends in glory.

“Whoever wants to save his life will lose it...but whoever loses it to Me will save it...”

He’s NOT saying, “If you want real life then shame on you – wanting life is BAD!” No! He knows we all want life – He takes that as a given!

He’s saying, “But the ways you go about trying to GET life will not actually lead to life... they’re all dead ends! ...Instead, fall into My hands every day...follow My way – a death that leads to INFINITE LIFE...Say “No!” to yourself and completely trust My renovation plan EVERYDAY...

And in the end, this shack that you reluctantly gave Me will be a CASTLE, the PALACE, the real YOU I always intended it to be.