

Sermon
Sunday, July 29, 2018
Ephesians 3:14-21 /John 6:1-21
Can You Imagine?
Rev. David Martin

I'd like to start today's sermon with a grace – a prayer - which may be offered at the conclusion of the Daily Office of Morning Prayer. This grace is based on part of today's second reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

“Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to God from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus, for ever and ever. Amen.” (BCP page 102)

Did you catch that? Let me share that first part with you again.

“Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.”

We give glory to God whose power is able to work in us. And that work we can accomplish with God's power is going to be INFINITELY more than we can ask for. And not only more than we can ask for – that power and that work is more than we can imagine.

What we can do with the power of God on our side - is more than we can imagine.

That totally blows my mind.

More than we can imagine.

Today's gospel lesson covers a lot of ground. So while we're trying to think about doing things greater than we can imagine, I'd like to concentrate on this amazing story of feeding 5,000 people with just two fish and five loaves of bread. This story is so important in Jesus' ministry, it appears in all four Gospels – and there are few differences in the tale from writer to writer. Clearly, all who witnessed the feeding of 5,000 people did not forget it.

To set the scene, Jesus and his friends have attempted to get away from the crowds that are swarming them where ever they go. They get in a boat and sail four miles from Capernaum across the Sea of Galilee. Jesus finds a secluded spot where they can rest and escape the crowd. But they have little time to themselves.

The crowds can clearly see where the boat is headed. They follow around the shore on foot. They must travel about 9 miles to get to the same spot. We are told the feast of the Passover is approaching. So many travelers will be on the road as well headed for Jerusalem. It's certain many of those travelers join the group following Jesus. In time, the throng catches up with Jesus. He has compassion on them and realizes they are tired and hungry.

And that's when the unimaginable happens.

There is a brief discussion among Jesus and his disciples about how much it would cost to feed so many people. And even if they had the money, where would they get so much food on such short notice. John is the only gospel writer to tell us where the 2 fish (they must have been pickled to preserve them in the hot sun) and 5 loaves of bread (most likely barley because it was the least expensive grain) came from. Andrew, the "fixer" of the disciples, finds a boy who has brought the small lunch for himself. Jesus blessed the food and it is distributed to everyone present. The Bible tells us everyone ate "as much as they wanted" and everyone was "satisfied."

But if that isn't enough, there were leftovers. There was enough food left to fill twelve baskets. Each Jewish disciple would have carried a "kophinos" – a bottle shaped basket used while traveling for multiple purposes. Twelve disciples. Twelve baskets.

Jesus and his disciples fed 5,000 people. And all they had to work with were 2 fish and 5 small loaves of bread.

Can you imagine?

This miraculous event has been studied through the ages by Biblical scholars. The reason it is so popular is that there are several ways to look at this miracle. When Jesus healed the sick or raised the dead, the miracle was clear. There was nothing to discuss. The sick were made well. The dead returned to life.

But exactly HOW did THIS miracle work?

We can take the story at face value and say Jesus miraculously created enough food for everyone. That's what happened.

Can you imagine?

Some scholars take a more sacramental approach to this miracle. With just the little food available, Jesus held a Eucharist – or communion – and gave each person just a tiny taste of what was to soon become the last supper. The miracle is that everyone was satisfied (spiritually anyway) with just a morsel to eat.

Can you imagine?

There are many scholars who look at the event not as a miracle which multiplied the 2 fish and 5 loaves – nor as a spiritual miracle. The miracle could have been that Jesus took the example

of the young child and encouraged everyone to share what they had brought with them on their journey.

I mean really – Can you imagine that everyone who took that 9 mile hike hadn't brought at least a little snack for such a journey? And what about the people who were headed somewhere to celebrate Passover? Can you imagine heading out on such a trip without taking some supplies along with you?

Perhaps no one had intended to share their own food. They were hoarding it for themselves, not wanting to even take a bite for fear someone would see what they had to eat and want some of it too. Then Jesus showed everyone what true charity was all about – using the boy as an example. A miracle occurred when Jesus turned the **me-first attitudes** into **how-can-I-help-my-neighbor attitudes**.

Can you imagine?

Maybe this is even the very story Paul had in mind when writing his friends in Ephesus. “Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.”

There is a popular contemporary Christian song called “I Can Only Imagine.” There was even a movie made about the song and its composer which came out early this year. The singer wonders – imagines – how they will react when they die and finally see God. It's a fine song. It soars and tugs at your heartstrings. The video takes it even further with a variety of people holding photos of their loved ones who have died. They imagine seeing them again someday.

That is lovely thought – a lovely song. There's nothing wrong with imagining what it will be like at the end of our lives when we will be united in God's kingdom. But I do not believe that is what we are called to spend much of our time doing.

God calls us to do works that are greater and more amazing than we can even imagine. We are called to look beyond our limited minds and imagine a better world and to make that better world happen.

Perhaps a different song works a little better.

*Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people sharing all the world*

*You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one*

I hope someday you'll join us

And the world will be as one

What is out there that is so big....so scary....so difficult....so infuriating....that you can't even imagine making a difference in it?

At Camp Stoney three weeks ago, we read this same miracle story of feeding the multitude at morning worship. During Bible study, we asked the campers how many people they thought it took to make that dinner happen. I was sitting with a group of 10 girls. Most of them said "one" (Jesus) or "two" (Jesus and the child with the food). But one 8 year-old girl (who doesn't attend any church at all, by the way) said "I think it took everyone there to make the dinner. I mean some people had to help pass it out. And some people had to make sure everyone had seconds. And some people had to help clean up."

Ah. We are clearly called to use the power God instills in us and do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. **But we don't have to do it alone.** We are stronger together. The miracle of feeding 5,000 people certainly must have taken everyone there to make it happen – at least in one way or another.

My good friends of St. Mark's. Your assignment for today is to imagine something unimaginable. Something you believe needs to be done:

A work that would help those who suffer.

A deed that would stop injustice.

An act of kindness that would change someone's life.

Something you can't even imagine being a part of. Something that is beyond your wildest dreams of making a difference. And as always, what seems unimaginable to one person, might seem like a piece of cake to someone else. We all have different gifts. We all have different takes on what need to be done.

We all have different imaginations.

You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I'd like for you to privately share with me this week what you have imagined.

What can you imagine? What can we imagine together?

Can you imagine?

“Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to God from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus, for ever and ever. Amen.”