

Jesus' Feeding of the 500" - Part 2

August 16 2020

This is a continuation of my article on Matthew 14: 13-21. which was included in the newsletter two weeks ago

Jesus provides for both the physical and the spiritual needs of the crowd that have followed Him to Bethsaida. He does this by feeding them, curing those who were sick, and giving them spiritual teachings as well.

Jesus is able to miraculously multiply a small meal for one person - five loaves and two fish - into a feast for a crowd of between 15,000 and 25,000 people, with enough food left over to fill twelve baskets. This is consistent with other Gospel passages which indicate that with Jesus anything is possible and that in His presence all our needs are met with great abundance.

In verse 19, we are told that "Taking the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up into heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds." This pattern of taking, blessing, breaking, and giving is the exact same pattern in the exact same order that we see Jesus following at the Last Supper. And it is the same pattern that we follow during a celebration of the Eucharist.

In Part 1 of this message, I mentioned how Jesus had just been rejected by the religious and political leaders in that area and how the crowds had left the towns and villages to follow Him to this deserted place outside of Bethsaida. It was as if He was calling people to follow Him out of their synagogues, out of the towns and villages, out of what was familiar to them. He was calling them to a new and different place, both literally and spiritually.

In Greek (the original language in which the New Testament was written) the word for Church is "ecclesia". It is found 114 times in the New Testament. In ancient Greece this term was used for a gathering of politicians who came together to debate, much like our politicians in Canada gather in the House of Commons. But it also came to be used to describe early Christians coming together for worship. *Ecclesia* refers to the assembly, gathering, or congregation of Christians.

The origin of the word "ecclesia" is also important. It is a compound word consisting of two Greek words - "ek" which means "out of" and the verb "kaleo" meaning "to call". Therefore, although "ecclesia" came to be known as a gathering (of either politicians or Christians), the word literally means being "called out of". In other words, there is a sense that the Church is a gathering of people who have been *called out of the world* to come together for a very specific purpose (to be followers of Jesus).

We experience this every week when we are "called out of" our ordinary, everyday existence in the world to come together (either in person or online) to worship God, to have fellowship with

each other, and to return to the world transformed by this spiritual experience.

And this brings me to where I began with the feeding of the 5000.

I believe that in addition to being a wonderful miracle, this was actually an early version of a church service, complete with its own early version of a Eucharist! Jesus called these people out of the world to come and worship Him, and He fed them with physical and spiritual food in this early model of the Eucharist. It is true that the Eucharist causes us to remember Jesus' sacrifice on the cross (which had not yet happened when this miracle took place), but I believe that in this miracle Jesus may have been laying the groundwork for the Last Supper and showing His disciples what He wanted this new community of faith to look like.

So although the Feeding of the 5000 is a wonderful miracle in itself, I believe that it also has a much deeper significance. As I mentioned last time, other than the resurrection, this is the only miracle that is included in all four Gospels. The Gospel writers may have understood the deeper significance of this miracle which may be why all four of them chose to include it.

Jonathon +