

August 27, 2006

## **A Taste of Heaven**

*Matthew 15:29-39*

Religion is a mystery, heaven is a mystery, free will is a mystery. By his actions when he lived among us Jesus gives us a glimpse of reality beyond the cataract that clouds our vision. God promised Abraham that he would lead him to a new land and he did. Jesus promises us the life more abundant and just like Abraham had to wind his way across the near East to find the Promised Land we have to live our life in a manner that will allow us to enjoy Christ's promise.

Weezie named her cat Hokey Pokey. We just call her "Cat". "Cat" won't have much to do with water that has been sitting in her water bowl for a day or two. Stale water, no life. Replace it with fresh and it sounds like an outboard motor as "Cat" goes after it. Fresh water, water with life.

Our early glimpse of Jesus in action was at the wedding feast in Canaan. This was his first miracle that we know about.

Water for purification had been setting in jars for days, weeks, maybe months. It was “still” water with little refreshing properties. About the most you can say for it was that it was wet.

Jesus turned this tepid water into wine, and not any old wine, but a fine wine that got the attention of the Maitre’d at the wedding feast. Stale water into wine with a body, with a life, with a zest. As a result the lives of the guests at the wedding feast were enriched even though that enrichment may have been temporary.

Last week we read where Jesus was visited by a blind man. Jesus touched the blind man’s life and his vision was restored. Then and there his life was changed as he moved from darkness into the life more abundant. A movement that took place not at some undetermined future, but then and there. The Promised Land.

Today we come to what I view as one of Jesus’ greatest and most revealing miracles, the feeding of the five thousand. It is

here we find the foundation on which the capitalistic society is built. A society that supports a democratic way of life. A society that opens the door to unlimited possibilities. If you will, the life more abundant.

Jesus was preaching to the multitude and what preaching it must have been. People flocked to the countryside to hear what this gifted man had to say. They stood around for hours out in the open, out in the sunshine, just to listen.

It has been my privilege to read sermons by outstanding preachers of today and yesterday. Words on the printed page are not nearly as effective as those that come from the mouth of the speaker. Hughey Reynolds amazed us as he recited the scriptures from memory. The Bible came alive. It made a difference.

It has been my privilege to hear some outstanding preachers. Preachers whose words and thoughts made a difference. Even now, after years and with a failing memory some of the thoughts that they expressed are still with me to help

guide my life. Thoughts about the shiny side of doubt. And there is one particular sentence that has been of an unusual value to me as I made the decisions that affect my life, "*be kind to the yellow line.*"

Through the miracle of television I was able to visit with Billy Graham. I marveled as his words touched hundreds, even thousands of people sitting in the grandstand. Words that lifted them out of the stands onto the field to kneel in homage to our Creator.

These preachers, smart and talented as they were and are, were just a shadow of He who had gone before. What it must have been to hear from the mouth of Jesus his emphasis and observe his mannerisms.

These five thousand must have found it wonderful. Wonderful enough to spend three days in the countryside listening to what he had to say. Jesus felt for their comfort. He proposed to his disciples that they feed them before sending them on the journey home.

As the disciples tried to figure out how to feed these people a little boy brought them seven little barley biscuits and a few sardines. Matthew tells us that Jesus took the loaves and the fishes, blessed them, broke them and distributed them to the crowd. A miracle regarding the multiplication of things. I believe it was more than that. I bet it was a miracle that opened the minds and hearts of the crowd. Because of the importance of the rule of life that is based on this miracle I bet there was more there than Matthew tells us.

As a practical matter I doubt that all these people left home to go into “ye know not where” without some preparations. I bet that some of them, most of them, stuck some road rations in a sack. How else would they expect to be fed out there on the countryside?

Now the time wears on. Being human they kept the food they carried to themselves. After all it wasn't enough to make a dent in the need. If they opened the bag they would have to share with those that didn't have any food and that would take

away from them and their family. So they kept the bag shut and listened to their stomach growl and above the rumble they mulled over the words that they heard from this master preacher.

Then there was this bolt of lightening that hit in their midst, a little boy offered up his all. Sharing that which Jesus had been pouring into their minds took over. They spread their blankets on the ground. Those that had food spread it out and shared with those that didn't. And therein lies the miracle. A miracle that has been repeated time and time again until this very day.

A man takes a surplus from his earnings and puts it in a savings account. The bank commingles those savings with thousands of others. Out of those commingled savings the bank lends a man money to build a house. To move toward the life more abundant. The home builder buys materials and hires help to do the building. The material men and the laborers put a part of that which is paid them into their own savings account and so it goes, the miracle of the multiplication of the little.

A man buys stock in a corporation. The corporation

purchases equipment and hires workers. The corporation uses these to manufacture something that people want. Out of the profits arising out of the purchase of the product the value of the individual investment increases providing the investor with retirement benefits. The miracle of the multiplication of the little.

The miracle of the capitalistic system. And out of this system, hospitals are built, churches are formed, schools are financed, taxes are paid, charities are created. It is a way to the more abundant life that Jesus promised. A way that came to life on a countryside a couple of thousand years ago.

Our country is trying to bring a free society to other countries worldwide. In my opinion it won't happen until we can first bring the various countries to recognize the multiplication of the little. Out of the application of this rule comes individual responsibility and out of individual responsibility comes democracy.

A miracle occurred on that hillside when that little boy

brought the little he had and laid it in the hands of Jesus. This miracle keeps popping up as little people, unknown people, limited people take the little they have and dedicate it to the common good.

The Christian church is a prime example of the multiplication of the little. There was a handful of unknown, mostly unlearned men who brought the little they had and put it in the hands of Jesus. This nucleus of the Christian church was surrounded by the might of pagan world. These unknowns brought what little they had, barley biscuits and sardines, placed them in the hand of Jesus and within three hundred years the Christian church had triumphed throughout the known world.

The birth of our nation is an example of this miracle. A little band of frontiersmen, ill equipped with little financial support took on the most powerful, the richest nation in the world. This little band, dedicated *“their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor”* to fight for the ideals of a republic of the people.



This dedication of the little is behind the highest works in every relationship of life. All of the great social reform that has liberated individuals to reach for their highest potential have come about because little people, limited people, small groups of people dedicated the little they had to the common good and put it in the hands of the Christ.

This miracle takes place in our life when we find ourselves faced with overwhelming trials, difficulties, and responsibilities as we take the little strength we have and turn it over to Jesus. He will multiply that little so that our strength will be sufficient to raise us above that which confronts us.

Unfortunately that miracle on the mountainside wasn't the end of the story. In a few short years the religious leaders had turned their people against what they saw and heard that day. The people turned from their filled minds and their full bellies to succumb to the cry for crucifixion. Today we face an assault against those things we hold so dear. A miracle in reverse. A little doubt, a little irresponsibility, a little indifference and that

which has been give us will be taken away. It won't happen overnight but little by little, drop by drop, as we sit back indifferent and dream our future away. The multiplication of the little applies not just to the builders but also to the destroyers.

Maybe this miracle event is telling us that the Kingdom of God is where man takes what he has and dedicates it to the common good. Heaven on Earth may not be so far fetched after all.

## *Pastor's Message*

*All things of value and excellence in the world depend for their existence and continuation upon the capacity, labors, and perseverance of a very few people. Out of all the billions of human beings who have lived only a handful of names have come down to us from the past. At any given time in a community or nation it is upon the shoulders of a small number that order and excellence rest.*

*Knowledge and truth have come to the world at a terrific cost to those who have been their sponsors. Their compensation was mostly persecution, exile or death. The masses of humanity love their delusions, ignorance and superstitions.*

*Culture and refinement and appreciation of the beautiful have a precarious existence in any nation or community.*

*The material wealth of the world is created by the imagination, enterprise and labor of a small number of people.*

*The moral and spiritual values of a community or nation are upheld and sustained by small groups of individually devoted souls.*

*When we are tempted to depreciate mankind, let us remember the vast hosts of nameless ones who "volunteer" to be upholders of truth, the defenders of civilization, the creators of wealth, and the sponsors of morality and religion in the present as well as in ages past.*

*The decisive question for every man is whether or not he will place himself among the volunteers who are determined that excellence shall not perish from the earth.*

### *PRAYER*

*O God, let me so think, act, and live as to be numbered with those who make the best possible in the day in which I live. Amen.*