

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Matthew 14:13-21

Year A - Proper 13, Text: Matthew 14:13-21
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Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle reported in all four Gospels. Some see in it an action that anticipates the inauguration of the Lord's Supper. But it is also important to recognize that the terms used in 14:19 were used regularly at Jewish meals.

The event also looks backward to the feeding of the Israelites with manna during their time in the wilderness (Exodus 16). It may also reflect Elisha's feeding of 100 men with small provisions (2 Kings 4:42-44).

In Jesus' day, some within Judaism believed that when the Messianic Age broke in, the manna would fall from the heavens once again. In 2 Baruch 29:8 (a Pseudepigraphical writing), we read:

"And it will happen at that time that the treasury of manna will come down again from on high, and they will eat of it in those years because these will be they who will have arrived at the consummation of time."

Matthew (15:32-39) and Mark (8:1-10) also report the feeding of the 4,000. In Matthew, both feeding miracles take place to the west of the Sea of Galilee. In Mark, Jesus feeds the 5,000 to the west of the Sea of Galilee, but feeds the 4,000 (most likely, Gentiles) in the Gentile region of the Decapolis, to the southeast of the Sea of Galilee.

The number twelve most likely reflects the concept of 12 Old Testament tribes and 12 New Testament disciples (forerunners of God's new and true Israel). The number seven reflects the fact that Old Testament writings refer to seven Gentile nations that live on Israel's borders — nations that Israel is to hate and destroy (Joshua 3:10; Deuteronomy 7:1-2). Jesus, however, dealt with the Gentiles in a merciful manner.

Note the phrase "besides women and children" (14:21). According to the customs of the day, women and children would stand or sit separate from men. That they should sit down and partake with the men, and actually be served by the disciples, turns the event

into what has been called "a daring experiment in fellowship." Sex and age do not constitute a barrier when Jesus is believed in, obeyed, and followed!

In the world of Jesus' day, to eat together was to declare, "We are family! I will seek only the well-being of those with whom I eat — and if necessary, I will defend them with my life." In our own day, the Lord of creation continues to provide humanity with daily bread. The world produces more bread than ever before in history. The fact that many on Planet Earth continue to experience hunger is due, not to the lack of divine provision, but often to the lack of caring, sharing, and compassionate human distribution. Some who live in affluent countries define being blessed as enjoying an affluent lifestyle. Jesus, however, links being blessed to reflecting His servant lifestyle.

Communion Imagery in the Text

Ponder the practice of Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430) when celebrating the Eucharist. What follows contains a simplified version of the wording he used when inviting worshipers to participate in the Eucharist. He pointed to the altar and said, "Behold, the body of Christ"; then he turned to the people and said, "And you are the body of Christ." He then invited the people, "Come, eat what you are," and concluded this section of the liturgy with, "Go forth to be what you eat."

The implications of Augustine's words are profound! Indeed, many of today's worshipers need to be taught that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is not merely a "getting forgiven" event, but a call to live "the Jesus' way" in a forgiving, caring, sharing, serving community. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we are to bear in mind that while we participate in Jesus' Holy Meal, millions around the world are sharing that same Holy Meal — and that they are our brothers and sisters in Christ. The Lord's Supper is not only communion with God, but communion with one another!

The question is: How do we share our faith in Jesus the Messiah with the hungry of this world? How do we manage and share with them the physical and spiritual resources that have been entrusted to, which come from God himself?

When pondering Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 (14:13–21) and His sharing a meal with the disciples in an Upper Room, we would do well to give thought to Matthew 14:1–12.

In this latter section, we read about Herod Antipas putting John the Baptist into prison (most likely in the fortified palace of Machaerus to the northeast of the Dead Sea), celebrating his birthday with his political elite, and then having John the Baptist beheaded. After Jesus hosted that final meal in the Upper Room, He led His disciples into a garden where He was captured by His political and spiritual opponents, and was then crucified. The irony is that history eventually vindicated the messages and ministries of both John the Baptist and Jesus!