

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Intro

I love this story – and I love preaching on this story.

It was, I think, the second or third sermon I ever preached at my Field Placement Parish when I was in Seminary.

And it was also the first time I was brave enough to get creative with a sermon and looked at it from the small boy's perspective – which we've done several times, in various ways, here.

So, the temptation for me is to try and cram every possible idea I've ever had about this story in to one sermon that would go on and on and on;
- but, it's summer – so I'll try not to.

I. Scholars

A. One of the interesting things about John's rendition of the Feeding of the 5,000 is the way Biblical Scholars divide into two camps over how the miracle occurred.

1. On the one hand, there are the "pure miracle" folks who say Jesus blessed the bread and fish and POOF there was enough to feed everybody.

2. And on the other hand, are those who say it was a group effort.

3. This school of thought holds, that when all the people of the crowd saw Jesus begin to share the meager offering he had, they all dug into the food they were secretly hoarding for themselves and began to share, and low and behold, there was enough for everybody.

- Much less romantic, but it has its merits.

B. But to me, the important part is not so much the HOW, but the WHAT – what happened.

1. If you look at it, BOTH events are miracles: whether you are in the “POOF – there was enough” camp, or the “Everybody Shared” camp.

2. In fact, if you think about it, getting 5,000 people to share their food with others might even be a greater miracle.

3. So in reality they are both miracles;
- and both need the BOY – for without him there isn’t any miracle at all.

C. You see, it was that small Boy, **offering what he had**, that made the miracle possible.

1. Now some might argue, Jesus didn’t need the Boy – he already knew what he was going to do – the Gospel says so.

2. **Or did he?**

3. What would Jesus have done if the Boy had not offered his bread and fish?

4. There may not have been a miracle at all.

5. BUT THE BOY **WAS** THERE – and he offered what he had;
- and as a result 5,000 people were fed,
- and there were leftovers!

6. And he could run all the way home to tell his mother about “the miracle that Jesus and I did.”

7. The little Boy did not have much to offer;
- just some bread for the poor made from the grain used to feed animals, and a couple of dried, pickled sardine size fish.

8. **But he gave what he had**,
- he offered it wholeheartedly, and it was enough.

II. Barrington Bunny

A. To me that's what this whole story is all about – it's a story about gifts

1. The focus shouldn't be on the fact that 5,000 people were fed, the focus is HOW they were fed – because one little Boy offered what he had so that Jesus could perform a miracle.

2. It's a story about gifts – and using the gifts we have.

3. I'd like to share another story with you about gifts, it's a story that has played an important role in my life's journey, and I'd like to share it with you.

4. It's called "The Story of Barrington Bunny" and it's from a book called, "The Way of the Wolf" by Martin Bell.

5. It's the story of a small rabbit and the Great Silver Wolf, who is the God image in these stories.

6. So, I give you the Story of Barrington Bunny, slightly shortened, from "The Way of the Wolf."

ONCE upon a time in a large forest, there lived a very furry bunny, named Barrington; who was, as far as he knew, the only bunny in the forest.

When Christmas Eve came, Barrington was very lonely and didn't feel like going home all by himself. So he decided that he would hop for a while in the center of the forest, making wonderful designs in the snow.

While he was hopping, Barrington happened upon several of the animal families having their Christmas parties. Barrington tried to go to the Squirrels' Christmas party, but he couldn't climb trees. He tried to go to the Beavers' Christmas party, but he couldn't swim. He also tried to go to the party the Field Mice were having, but they couldn't hear him asking to come, due to the howling of the wind. Finally, Barrington just gave up and sat in the snow and cried.

Suddenly, Barrington was aware that he was not alone. He looked up and strained his shiny eyes to see who was there.

To his surprise he saw a great silver wolf. The wolf was large and strong and his eyes flashed fire. He was the most beautiful animal Barrington had ever seen. For a long time the silver wolf didn't say anything at all. He just stood there and looked at Barrington with those terrible eyes.

Then slowly and deliberately the wolf spoke. "Barrington," he asked in a gentle voice, "Why are you sitting in the snow?"

Barrington replied, "Because it is Christmas Eve and I don't have any family and bunnies aren't any good."

"Bunnies are, too, good," said the wolf. "Bunnies can hop and they are very warm."

"What good is that?" Barrington sniffed.

"It is very good indeed," the wolf went on, "because it is a gift that bunnies are given, a free gift with no strings attached. And every gift that is given to anyone is given for a reason. Someday you will see why it is good to hop and to be warm and furry."

"But it's Christmas," moaned Barrington, "and I'm all alone. I don't have any family at all."

"Of course you do," replied the great silver wolf. "All of the animals in the forest are your family." And then the wolf disappeared. He simply wasn't there.

Barrington had only blinked his eyes, and when he looked— the wolf was gone.

"All of the animals in the forest are my family," thought Barrington. "It's good to be a bunny. Bunnies can hop. That's a gift. A free gift."

Remembering this, Barrington left presents for the other animals. He left some new sticks for the Beavers' dam; and dead leaves and grass to make the Squirrels' nest nice and warm. To each gift he attached a note that said: "A gift, a free gift, no strings attached. Signed a member of your family."

It was late when Barrington finally started home. And what made things worse was that he knew a blizzard was beginning.

Hop. Hop. Hippity-hop. Soon poor Barrington was lost. The wind howled furiously, and it was very, very cold. "It certainly is cold," he said out loud.

“It’s a good thing I’m so furry. But if I don’t find my way home pretty soon even I might freeze!”

And then he saw it— a baby field mouse lost in the snow, and the little mouse was crying.

“Hello, little mouse,” Barrington called.

“Don’t cry. I’ll be right there.” Hippity-hop, and Barrington was beside the tiny mouse.

“I’m lost,” sobbed the little fellow. “I’ll never find my way home, and I know I’m going to freeze.”

“You won’t freeze,” said Barrington. “I’m a bunny and bunnies are very furry and warm. You stay right where you are and I’ll cover you up.”

Barrington had only two thoughts that long, cold night. First he thought, “It’s good to be a bunny. Bunnies are very furry and warm.” And then, when he felt the heart of the tiny mouse beneath him beating regularly, he thought, “All of the animals in the forest are my family.”

Next morning, the field mice found their little baby, asleep in the snow, warm and snug beneath the furry carcass of a dead bunny. Their relief and excitement was so great that they didn’t even think to question where the bunny had come from.

And as for the beavers and the squirrels, they still wonder which member of their family left the little gifts for them that Christmas Eve.

After the field mice had left, Barrington’s frozen body simply lay in the snow. There was no sound except that of the howling wind. And no one anywhere in the forest noticed the great silver wolf who came to stand beside that brown, lop-eared carcass.

But the wolf did come.

And he stood there.

Without moving or saying a word.

All Christmas Day.

Until it was night.

And then he disappeared into the forest.

III. Gifts

A. Like that little Boy, like Barrington Bunny, we too have been given gifts.

1. God has given each of us our own special gifts and talents and the time to use them anyway we wish.

2. We can **HOARD** them for ourselves,
- or we can offer them to Jesus to use.

3. How many miracles is Jesus **KEPT** from doing because we **won't** share our time and our talents with him?

4. How many opportunities have **WE** missed out on to experience a **miracle** that "**Jesus and I did?**"

5. Well, we might say, "I don't have much to offer," or "I'd be embarrassed to offer this puny amount to Jesus."

6. But the Boy didn't have much either.

7. The truth of the matter is: **Little is always much in the hands of Jesus. Little is always much** in the hands of Jesus.

B. The truth of the matter is that we have everything we need right here to accomplish great things.

1. All we need to do is have just the tiniest amount of **FAITH** that Jesus will give us what we need.

2. Think about it, why would Jesus ask us to do something and not give us what we need?

3. What kind of sadistic pleasure is there in that?
- That's not how Jesus works.

4. Jesus wants to give – and to give abundantly – so that there are left-overs.

C. Each of us has been given special gifts by God to be used in the care of one another and of our world.

1. And it's up to us to offer these gifts to God and allow God to put them to work through us.

2. We, like the little Boy, simply need to trust Jesus and venture forth, taking an active role in making God's love known in and through St Columba's.

3. And this is all the more important as we work to rebuild our mission and ministry after COVID.

4. It may be serving on a Committee – helping with an Outreach Ministry, or visiting the sick, welcoming Newcomers or any number of things.

5. You may think it a small contribution, but remember: **Little is always much in the hands of Jesus.**

6. It takes all kinds of shapes and sizes of gifts and skills to make the mosaic of ministry complete.

7. I think this quote from Theodore Roosevelt sums it up nicely, "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are." [Repeat]

Conclusion

We all have gifts – and it's up to us whether we share them, and with whom we share them.

All Jesus wants is that we step up, like the Boy, and give it a try

As St Teresa of Avila is so fond of reminding us:

- Jesus has no **hands** to use, unless we give him ours
- He has no **feet** to use, unless we give him ours
- He has no **voice** to use, unless we give him ours
- He has no **GIFTS** to use, unless we give him ours

Let us bring to Jesus **WHAT** we have and **WHO** we are,
- for when we do, there is no telling what Jesus can do **WITH** us and
THROUGH us.

We may feel sorry or embarrassed that we don't have more to offer, but remember, **little** is always **much** in the hands of Jesus.

Bring what you have – offer who you are – and then you too can experience **the miracle that Jesus and YOU do together.**

Let us Pray

Almighty God whose loving hand has given us all that we possess: Grant us grace that we may honor you with the gifts and talents you have given us, and use them always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. AMEN. (BCP #38 & 61 adapted)