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Sermon
Rose Hill Church
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Introductory Remarks 1:

- Looking out over our congregation this morning I realize I have had the opportunity to meet many of you, and have been blessed greatly this past several months to serve as your Minister of Congregational Care, and to have visited so many of our congregation in their homes, in hospital, care homes all over the Puget Sound.
- It is imperative that each person here know that you are special, you are loved, you are wanted, and you are valuable. Many in this congregation have, over the years, given of themselves in untold ways to make this church a home of safety, warmth, support and caring, and I think it is not too far off to say we are here because we stand on the shoulders of so many faithful saints!
- Please let us take a few moments and give a warm round of applause and say a silent prayer of blessing for all those who have given so much and asked so little for so many others.

Introductory Remarks 2:

I would like to mention, too, the blessings Jan and I feel in having our 4-year-old Grandson Hudson spending the weekend with us. Yesterday we learned these all-important facts:

- Pickles are actually naked
- Fish do NOT pass gas
- And Ouma and Papa's toothpaste is too sparkly (strong) that is.

A Place at the Table

Before we take a look at our passage, Matthew 15:29-39 I want to note a few things;

- **First**, further reference to our discussion this morning can be found in Mark's Gospel, particularly Chapters 6-8
- **Second**, Church tradition holds that Matthew (Levi), one of the 12 and the former Tax Collector, wrote this Gospel, probably around 60-65 AD, shortly after Mark's Gospel was written.
- Matthew's work has the strongest Jewish focus and was written with an eye to convincing Jews and reassuring new Jewish Christians of Christ's Messiahship
- **Third**, In the previous chapter, Matthew 14, the writer describes Jesus spending a day in an overwhelmingly Jewish area at the north end of the Sea of Galilee; Jesus healed many, then turned 5 loaves and 2 fish into enough to feed an estimated crowd of 5,000 men (Jews did not count women and children in the numbering), with 12 baskets full of broken **pieces of bread** collected at the end.
- Okay, so now in the beginning of Matthew 15 we see some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law who have traipsed out into this outlying area to figure out who this Jesus is. They cannot ignore the crowds and the amazing things taking place, but they get tripped up on religiosity. They are stuck because their tradition says you must wash hands **before eating bread (or anything)**.
- As we continue reading Matthew, we see Jesus takes the disciples up to the coast, north and west of Galilee, to the region of Tyre and Sidon, two cities known to be "non-Jewish". Jesus speaks with a Canaanite woman who is begging for Jesus to cast demons out of her daughter, **they have a discussion about bread and crumbs of bread**, and He ends up praising her faith and healing her demonized daughter.
- Now, as we get into our passage, Matthew has Jesus and His disciples going to the region of the Decapolis, a clearly gentile region. Jesus heals many over a three-day period and then **feeds them all! What? Primarily BREAD!**

- When we see a Biblical writer repeat something or we see a theme emerging, we have to sit up and pay attention; what is there in common here?
- Bread (food of the day) with the 5,000
- Bread (food of the day), Pharisees are critical about not washing hands before eating bread
- Bread (food of the day), Canaanite woman and the breadcrumbs
- Bread (food of the day) with 4,000 men plus myriads of others

As a main point here, Matthew is underscoring what Jesus Himself said; “I am the Bread of Life” and “I am the Bread of Heaven”;

Now let’s look at who Jesus reached out to;

- first, with the 5,000 it is thousands of Jewish people in a remote place, this is a **Jewish crowd**
- Second, a Syro-Phoenician, a Canaanite, a WOMAN!
- Third, we find Jesus in the Decapolis; this is a heathen place for sure. This area had 10 loosely associated cities on the south and east sides of the Sea of Galilee, also east of the River Jordan; the towns were developed and/or expanded by Roman soldiers rewarded for service to Caesar in the first century BC. These people worshipped idols, had multiple gods and temples and practiced cultic activity. Yet here is Jesus loving on them, healing them, and then having His disciples feed them!
- So, what seems unmistakable in the incident called “the Feeding of the 4,000” and the prior incident “the feeding of the 5,000” is the clear juxtaposition of these two very separate and distinct events by the Gospel writers.

Let’s look a little closer, because this is not only very interesting it is essential to what I believe God is up to back then and today!

- **5,000** These were at the NW side of the Sea of Galilee; these were Jews being healed and fed before they headed out to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover.
- This was a powerful affirmation that Jesus had come to the lost sheep of the House of Israel
- 12 baskets of remnants are picked up; this is a clear identification of these people with the 12 Tribes of Israel; 12 is always associated with them in Old Testament writings; (12 loaves in Leviticus 24 and 12 thrones referenced in Matt 19:28 wherein the 12 apostles will rule over the 12 tribes; Revelation talks of 12 gates and 12 guards to the Kingdom).
- **The second feeding happens in the region of the Decapolis.**

These are clearly Gentiles that Jews always saw as “outside” the purview of God’s care and concern; they were “sinners” who practiced lawlessness and were not worthy of God’s love

- There were 7 baskets of remnants picked up at this event. In Matthew’s time 7 was seen as the sign or number for gentiles. To note is that scholars point to this group as some of the descendants of the people living in the Promised Land prior to the Israelite arrival.
- Both Mark and Matthew are clearly linking the two locations with two separate groups of people who think, live and worship like groups from different planets. **Their two cultures could not be more different. Let me say this again: Their two cultures could not be more different.**
- **Yet, look what Jesus does and what He asks His disciples to do;**

He heals both groups

He feeds both groups

In fact, He spends 3 full days with the “heathen”, the “unsaved”, the outcasts, the “less thans”;

And Jesus has His disciples feed each group

- The message is absolutely clear in both Gospels; **it is as if the writers are taking neon signs and holding up these two events so the whole world sees what Jesus is about here;** these writers are going all the way back to the beginning; Genesis 22:18, and God’s promise to Abraham that through his seed all the nations of the world will be blessed.
- Jesus is opening the door on what is to take place in this coming era of “the Kingdom of God”
- Folks, this is profound to the core; this is what is called a massive paradigm shift in the reality of this world.

So what do we do with what we are learning here?

First, it is essential that we come to a place of realization that what the Triune God is up to is central to human history;

- All of humanity is treasured by our Creator God
- Jesus’ passion for the broken, sick, lost, destitute and suffering cannot be surpassed, diminished, minimized or denied.
- **By the way, can you imagine what this scene was like? Let me take you to the barren hills of the Decapolis:**
- It is summer, it is hot, it is the middle east
4,000 men and their loved ones are there;
- this crowd could be upwards of 15,000 to 20,000 people; these are people who know first from word of mouth and then clearly from their own eyewitness accounts and experiences that this man is not like any other person in their world;
- He is casting out demons, touching and healing lepers, taking unbelievable human suffering and relieving every single person He touches of their burdens;
- Remember, these folks are not Jewish and do not practice the same kind of hygiene the Jews did. You see, Jewish law meant you went outside

the camp to use the toilet, to dispose of sanitary items, to discard what otherwise bred disease and death. This place had to have the stench of disease, with the acrid smell of broken humanity permeating everything, including Jesus' clothes, hair and skin.

- This is far from a pretty sight. This is no Hallmark Special with heartwarming scenes of serenity. After 3 days in the hot summer sun, this scene had to be nearly unbearable for anyone, EVEN for One filled with the Spirit of God!
- Can you imagine the sight? People are lined up as far as the eye can see! Blind, lame, deaf, broken, demon possessed, malformed, some with skin sores oozing, those suffering from leprosy and those with crippling diseases, carried on mats by faithful, struggling and lost friends and family.
- And now, listen carefully and you can just faintly hear the people whispering timidly as they approach the King of all Creation. Many so burdened and bent over from back breaking work, carrying loads no beast of burden should bear. And then it happens! Jesus touches an elder, or a child and they cry out, not in pain but in worshipful exultation for the temporary freedom this curious Jewish man has brought. “Did you see His eyes,” a tearful and rejoicing mother exclaims as she walks with her now healed little boy! “His eyes! His eyes! I could see God in His eyes!”
- And think of who is doing this healing! This is not someone sent from another town. This is Jesus Christ. This is the Co-creator of the Universe folks! This is God Himself Who is touching, healing, loving, caressing, assuring and reassuring.
- **And now, what is He saying?** We can only imagine. “Please keep this one away from the fire. You need to feed this one more vegetables. Pour a little cool water on her feet every morning. She will feel much better.” And profoundly, people hear Him whispering in their ears, leaning in to look them in the eyes; “I came for you too. You are loved by Me, and by My heavenly father. You too...and you and you and you...have a place

at the Table! You too have a place at My Father's table! For we love you!"

- **So what does this mean for us here today? For you and you and you and me?**
- What do we really do when these truths stare us in the face?
- I believe it means that as far as the eye can see and beyond, every single person you see, smell, touch, feel, hear...everywhere you see them, in every way you find them...from every place they come to you and me from...
- **These are those we are to love.**
- These are those this Christ Incarnate was born for, lived for, gave His life for, and died and rose again for.
- Every single democrat, republican, Hindu, right-winger, left-winger, immigrant, undocumented alien, black person, white person, Asian person, First Nations person, Muslim, atheist, gay or straight person, every differently looking person than you, from every race, tribe and tongue...every homeless person, everyone suffering with mental illness. They all matter. Each ONE. Each and every one is just like those in these lines that Jesus loved, comforted, healed and set free.
- This also includes you...yes you! For Jesus is whispering to you and you and you, "Yes, I love you child. I love you more than you could ever imagine. You come too. Sit right here on my lap, for My Father and I love you dearly. And I know everything about you already...I love you now. I loved you yesterday. I love you tomorrow. You are precious and you are mine."
- Every single person of high means and low, every single solitary broken human being from every single walk of life is precious. Not just a little, folks...so precious that the Only Begotten Son of God gave ALL for this one and that one...not masses...not people lined up out the door...yes, Jesus saw the lines...but more importantly He saw and still sees the

person. **And He is calling each of us to See The Person. To see and care about each one!**

- **How do we do that?** How do we even begin to grasp what Jesus did in this story in Decapolis? How do we catch hold of Who this Jesus wants to be in our life?
- Only by becoming a disciple of the Lover of People's Souls. Only by seeking first His Kingdom. Only by trading in our smelly, stinky, self-aggrandizing, judgmental, infested bags of mildewed grudges, garments of unforgiveness and most of all, our self-loathing. Only by being willing to sit at Jesus' feet like these outcasts and let this God-Man have us; to have every cell in our body, every thought, every word, every deed, every action; everything in our past, present and future. All the garbage we were ever told, all the mean lies we swallowed without even thinking. All the shame we feel. All the loneliness and sense of failure. All of it. Jesus wants us to trade all this garbage for Him...for His bread, His life in us. His life lived through us.
- You see, salvation has never been about being good enough, or religious enough, or being able to follow all the right rules, attend the right church, wear the right clothes, or even lead groups in service, worship or anything else. Salvation is about bowing the knees of our hearts to the only King, the King of Kings, Jesus Christ. And that bowing, like in the hot, sweaty sun of a dark, backwater place like the Decapolis, is when you and I will hear His whisper of love, feel His touch of comfort, and will know from the inside out that we are His forever.
- You say you want a place at His table? He wants you there...whether you have walked out your faith since childhood or really never relinquished your life to Jesus ever...it is still the same. We get there the same way the Greco-Roman heathens did, the same way the Canaanite woman did, the same way everyone must; bowing our hearts to His Lordship and letting Him so fill us with His Spirit that we cannot help but love the each and every, and sit next to them at His Table.