



## The Feeding of the 16,000

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost  
4 August 2024

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Chris

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen. I have to apologize, you missed out on the story of the feeding of the 5000 last Sunday. Our CRASH students had so much to share under the theme “Created to Be” which was grounded in Psalm 139:14 - I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. Honestly, we run into 5 Sundays of Jesus as the “bread of life” through the month of August – the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 is only the beginning. Today, we hear Jesus speak the famous words, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” I believe you will get plenty of sermons about being fed in the weeks ahead. But not to leave you out of the feeding of the 5000 – instead, today, let’s talk about the feeding of the 16,000.

Technically, the Youth Gathering in New Orleans is finished...all but my expense reports to the Office of the Treasurer in Chicago. There are too many stories to tell in one sermon on one Sunday – you will have to be patient – as Pastor Tony tells me all the time – Pastor Chris “LESS IS MORE!” I want you all to remember that as we dig into the reading for today. We pick up the story of Jesus just after the feeding of the 5000. After everyone is fed, the crowds are satisfied, if only temporarily. The next few verses retell the story of Jesus walking on water. Honestly if you have just fed 5000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish – what’s a few divine moments defying gravity on the sea of Galilee. And then we pick up the story of Jesus on the other side of the lake. And with just a few verses – the people are hungry again. “What sign will you give us, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Or in the language of today – which honestly has not changed too much in some two thousand years – “Jesus, give me a sign!”

Returning to the ministry of the Youth Gathering, after a six-year hiatus, was glorious. In every single way. It is a gathered community that only finds its identity when the youth gathering takes place. Friends and colleagues from across the nation. Youth Directors, volunteers, deacons, pastors, team members – who come together and, by the very community gathered together proclaim, the “Kingdom of heaven has come near.” The thing that was different about this youth gathering over all the other youth gatherings that have taken place since 2000, is that for the first time in the 23 years I have served on the Mass Gathering team – there was not one word of grumble or complaint about any of our programming, speakers, song choices throughout the entire week. Which is no small miracle in itself! Usually, by the end of night one, someone is complaining about something and there is a small but mighty debate already taking place on Facebook – but, my friends, nothing! Which then led me down the road of waiting – you know, for the other shoe to drop...because someone, somewhere must be unhappy with something. Afterall it is the church. The body of Christ made up of all of us sinners –



## The Feeding of the 16,000

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost  
4 August 2024

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Chris

surely, we cannot all be happy with everything that is happening within the ministry of the church for even a single moment, can we?

Over four nights and a fifth morning, we gathered together some 16,000 participants and told the story of the love of Jesus. Our very own Jhonson Aparicio on opening night declared, “you are not alone.” And a professor of Old Testament studies unpacked the work of God’s hands as we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Another young man in our congregation, named Andrew, declared to every single person in the arena, “God sees you.” You are not irrelevant. You are not ignored. You are not dismissed. You are seen. A pastor of a community of homeless people in North Carolina, called the Dwelling, told a story of her church – where one of her homeless men needed an ID. And after months of work and research and assistance, finally this man and Pastor Emily went into the County Services office and he walked out with a name attached to his ID card. And for the first time in a long time, he felt like someone, not just a nameless face, but a person, known and seen. On the night of freedom, a pastor of one of our Outdoor ministries talked about his lifelong journey of comparing himself this more successful, athletic older brother as he unpacked the story of Jacob and Esau. This night was about freedom – that in Christ, “you are free.” And on Friday night, a deaf pastor from Florida told the story of coming to church when there was no deaf interpreter and looking at the guy hanging on the cross and wondering who that guy was. For the longest time, Pastor Lori, believed she was a mistake - as the only person born deaf in her family. It would be years later when she would learn the name of the man hanging on the cross and what he had done for her. In 30 years of youth gatherings, we have never had a deaf person speak their entire speech in American Sign Language. It was a risk. How would students react? Would they be respectful? Before Pastor Lori stepped out on to the stage, one of our emcees taught the entire arena to applaud in Sign language. And halfway through her speech, Pastor Lori signed the words for, “You are not a mistake.” And then she taught everyone in the arena to sign the same sentence to their neighbor. The high school students went wild and this pastor sat in his perch between the lighting and the sound techs and felt a wetness on his cheek for what became one of the most meaningful and overwhelming moments in the entire week and that was after my son owned the stage for some 4 minutes and 45 seconds on Tuesday night.

Forgive me, I know the reading for today is about how the people are ever satisfied – how they are always wanting more from Jesus – one more sign, one more miracle, one more piece of bread to satisfy the hunger and I am sure I am supposed to preach about the 5000 people gathered to eat are always wanting more from Jesus. But there were far too many moments over the days of the youth gathering to ask for anything more. The story of Jesus was spoken and heard and lived out and for all the work I coordinated with my team – Jesus is the one who showed up and gave the people a sign again and again and again – long before anyone was satisfied and long before anyone asked for a sign.



## The Feeding of the 16,000

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost  
4 August 2024

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Chris

If you doubt any of this, you only need to watch the video of worship from last Sunday where our own students tell the stories of their relationship with God be strengthened and their faith renewed. But before we say Amen. Before we celebrate Jesus as the bread of life inviting all who come to him to know they will never be hungry or thirsty again. Let's talk about the way home.

Pastor Tony and I were supposed to leave for the airport at 4am on the Monday after the gathering. Except, well, a global IT outage took out most of Delta – especially through Atlanta. When I woke up to my alarm at 4am - there was a text from Delta announcing our flight had been cancelled. I texted Tony at his hotel and told him I was rebooking on a later flight and going back to bed. He did the same. When he picked me up at 8am – he asked if I was able to pick up my first-class seat. We had both used miles to upgrade to first class to get home. Our reward for a job well done. Pastor Tony when he rebooked was automatically upgraded to First Class. However, Pastor Chris, when he rebooked, was not so lucky. This was my view all the way home to Milwaukee. Watching Pastor Tony drink champagne and eat his mushroom ravioli with red pepper butter sauce for lunch while I had water and a teeny-tiny bag of Sun Chips.

If ever I have wanted a sign. Jesus, give me a sign. Secretly I thought about Pastor Tony choking on one of his mushroom raviolis. But then it turns out, I would be the member of the church complaining – the very thing I believed to be a miracle in New Orleans for not happening. Okay – Jesus – thanks for the sign – Pastor Tony deserved his ravioli and so much more for a job very well done. I can be very happy for that. Thanks be to God! Amen.