

SAINT ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Lake Worth, Florida

Eve of Pentecost XII (Proper 13A) – August 2, 2008

Margot Emery

CELESTIAL PICNICS & EVERYDAY MIRACLES:

A Meditation on the Feeding of the Five Thousand

There's a beautiful church by the Sea of Galilee surrounded by date palms and bougainvillea. It claims to be the site of the feeding of the 5000 – that fabulous picnic that Jesus hosted so long ago. Of course anyone who's been a tourist in Israel will tell you that everywhere you go you're literally tripping over some sacred place that claims to be the site of a miraculous event. The church (which calls itself The Church of the Multiplication) may or may not be the exact site of the feeding of the 5000 but it certainly happened somewhere in that vicinity and the site is certainly a great one for a picnic. It's very close to the shore of one of the most beautiful lakes in the world. The shoreline is dotted with wildflowers, the lake is wonderfully blue and the dramatic Golan Heights rise across the water. There are seven springs nearby flowing into the lake. It's really perfect. If the feeding of the 5000 didn't happen here, it certainly should have.

We can look at that amazing picnic in a number of ways. Many theologians see it as a metaphor for the Eucharist. Some see it as a foretaste of the banquet that awaits us in heaven. Some would say that it's a manifestation of the miraculous by God the Son and God the Father. A rational humanist would say that Jesus inspired people to pool their resources in a way that all were able to share what they had equally. Coming as I do from Maine, I have no problem believing that a small amount of fish can feed a large number of people – my grandmother did that by making a great fish chowder with one small haddock.

But I have no doubt that God is capable of utterly flamboyant miracles – things that I can't even begin to comprehend. Our God is a big God, an enormous God who operates in ways we can't fathom. But there's something else that's very striking about this miracle, and that's the importance of the disciples. When the disciples came to Jesus and told him that the people were hungry their first thought was to send them back to the village to buy something for supper. But Jesus said, "You feed them." He didn't have to use the disciples to create this miracle but he chose this moment to teach a very important lesson, to train them for their mission. All the disciples saw was how little they had – 5 loaves and 2 fishes. But Jesus tells them to start with what they've got. Jesus' subtext was, "You can solve this problem!"

The problems in the world today are perhaps even more overwhelming than in Jesus' time. Human suffering and need are still terrible realities. What can we, as individuals, do about the vast need that surrounds us? It's tempting to believe, as the disciples did, that we have nothing to offer. But Jesus shows us what can be done with energy and teamwork.

Everybody here probably knows about the dining circles that are being formed at St. Andrew's. I think they're a great example of the kind of teamwork that Jesus had in mind at his impromptu picnic. In case you haven't heard about the dining circles – here's how they came about:

One day I was doing some (totally unrelated) research on line and I stumbled across an article about a group of women friends, somewhere in the northeast, who met once a month for dinner in a restaurant. At each dinner, sometime during the evening, the conversation would turn to the problems of the world, to human need and suffering. One night one of the women said, "Well what are we going to do about it?"

Here's what they came up with – every month instead of going to a restaurant they would share a simple potluck supper in each others' homes. They would pool the money saved by NOT dining out and at the end of a year donate it to a charity that they all believed in. There are now thousands of people in dining circles around the US and thousands of dollars flowing to important charitable work. At our recent supper on the Feast of St. Mary Magdalene, 6 dining circles were formed here at St. Andrew's Church. What we all agreed upon was that we wanted to go beyond the concept of a handout. We wanted to do something empowering for people in need.

The charity that will benefit at the end of the year was highly recommended by both our Rector and our Deacon and it's very close to home: The Maya Ministry of Lake Worth. The primary mission of the Maya Ministry is family literacy – and what could be more empowering than literacy? Nearly 100% of Maya women arrive in this country with absolutely no education. They are totally illiterate. Most of the men have about a 3rd grade reading level. Most of the women speak only the Mayan language, some of the men speak a bit of Spanish. You can imagine the effect that this has on the children. No one in the home is capable of helping with homework or reading any correspondence that comes from school. Young children are totally unprepared for kindergarten. No one is able to teach them their ABCs or read them a bedtime story. And yet there is a great desire in this community to read, write, and speak English. Besides its family literacy program, the Maya Ministry offers Early Childhood Education and after school tutoring. In addition, their active HIV/AIDS Prevention Program was the first HIV/AIDS education in Lake Worth in any language other than English. Until this program started the Mayas didn't even know that they lived in an AIDS "hot zone", with Florida ranked # 3 in the country in AIDS infections. Maya Ministries also operates a Youth Outreach Program for gang prevention and offers advocacy on issues of human trafficking. And they do all of this on a budget of \$150,000 per year. There are no cushy administrative salaries in this non-profit!

Do we dare to hope that our dining circles can have an impact? Can we help create some small everyday miracles by joining together with the Maya Ministry and supporting their efforts in our own modest way? If you are not in one of our dining circles and would like to be, please see me after the service. The circles which are forming are looking for members and you would be very welcome.

Our dining circles won't save the whole world, but can we imagine the miracle of an illiterate woman learning to read and write? The miracle of that woman helping her child with a homework assignment? The miracle of that child having success in an English language public school? Can we imagine the miracle of saving one person from being infected with HIV? Are these the everyday miracles that are waiting for us?

There are many messages in tonight's gospel – it IS a metaphor for the Eucharist and it IS a foretaste of the heavenly picnic that's waiting for all of us one day. And it IS a story about God creating a miracle. But let's not wait for God, like some supernatural conjuror, to do something miraculous for us – let's be co-creators with God in making our own everyday miracles.

The Gospel

Matthew 14:13-21

Jesus withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to

the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Harper's Bible Commentary

Matthew 14:13-21

In Mark (6:30-31) this feeding took place during the disciples' postmission retreat. Matthew places it immediately after the account of the Baptist's death: it was because Jesus heard of that that he went into retreat. Matthew has Jesus perform healings at this point. Further, he stresses the role of the disciples in distributing the provisions to the crowds (Matt. 14:19)—their function has a dignity of its own. The Evangelist also conforms the account of the blessing of the loaves to the institution narrative in the Last Supper. The loaf miracle foreshadows the church's Eucharist.



Margot Emery provides a vital lay ministry at Saint Andrew's as a liturgical leader, speaker, and former vestry member; her guidance in many other aspects of parish life is invaluable. For her service, she has been honored by the Episcopal Diocese of Southeast Florida.

Ms. Emery has served as Managing Director of the Core Ensemble, a chamber music theatre group, for several years. During that time, local and regional touring of the ensemble's chamber music and chamber music theatre pieces has expanded to include national and international work. The ensemble's programs now reach every region of the U.S. and have been heard in Russia, Ukraine, the Caribbean and in Australia. Under Ms. Emery's tenure, the Core Ensemble has performed in such prestigious venues as the Guggenheim Museum, Central Park SummerStage, the Chautauqua Institute, the Boston Center for the Arts and the Queensland Biennial Festival. Ms. Emery has been responsible for raising funds to commission 8 music theatre pieces, 12 chamber music works and 3 triple concertos. Past positions include Development Director for the USS Constitution Museum, Director of Development Services for the Palm Beach County Cultural Council and Palm Beach Development Manager for the Florida Philharmonic Orchestra. Ms. Emery holds diplomas from Laval University in Quebec City, Canada, and the Mozarteum in Salzburg, Austria.

Ms. Emery is the wife of Michael Parola, Percussionist and Artistic Director of the Core Ensemble, the mother of three adult daughters, Rose of Boston, Massachusetts, Sarah, of Pasadena, California, and Guylaine, of Montreal, Canada and the grandmother of Isabella of Pasadena and Jules of Montreal. She has served as Recording Secretary of the Board of Directors of the Eden Place Neighborhood Association.

The Core Ensemble website is www.core-ensemble.cc