

Trinity Episcopal Cathedral  
August 9, 2009  
Bill Lupfer Sermon

We just heard words read from Jesus, 2000 years after He spoke them. The people who were standing around Him at the time, and heard those words, had a slightly different perspective on life than you do. Most of the people who heard Jesus' words as He spoke them, and as they were standing near Him...most of those people had one question that stood out in their minds above all other questions. The question was: "Will I have enough food today to sustain my life?" And then immediately, the question went to: "Will the people I love...my family, and my friends...will they have enough food today, to sustain life?"

When Jesus spoke the words we heard read today, the poverty was unbelievable. Unbelievable. Thirty to fifty percent of the people in Palestine at that time, simply worried about the food for that day. It's no wonder that much of Scripture then--once you look at it from this perspective--it's no wonder that much of Scripture is about building a household. A household of God....with certain principles.

Now if you think about your own home...how do you know you're home...and how do people know that they're home with you? One of the ways is that, when you're home, you can eat without asking. Remember as a kid, you were kind of hungry at a friend's house? And you're doing the calculation...should I ask?...should I not? You know when you're not home. But when you're home, you can eat without asking.

Now awhile ago, my little brother Tommy was a student--this was years ago now--at Northwestern University, and my wife and I were there. I was in Graduate School, and my wife was teaching. So we wanted to help Tommy, my little brother, (hand raised above head), who is this tall now... feel at home with us. And we constantly encouraged him to eat when he was hungry, So my wife and I were thrilled that first day, when Tommy walked in, past us, to the refrigerator, opened it up, and started eating. Because we knew that we had done our job. And that he was "at home."

Many, many householder images in Scripture...all about creating a place where there is "enough." You come here now, and part of what we will celebrate this morning in worship is the Eucharist. Where each of us--no matter what we give to Trinity--each of us will receive "enough." It's a little wafer that some younger folks think of as "fish food," and it's a little sip of wine--or maybe just a blessing. But it doesn't cost you anything. We don't ask. No one with a clipboard is seeing whether you paid to get in. It's a symbolic meal of the household...that says: "If you are hungry--if you spiritually hungry--you are welcome here and you can eat." As long as you lived within those household rules, that reach out to others.

And so, out of the grinding poverty of Palestine, we have a symbol that has come 2000 years, into our own common life, that challenges us to live lives of faithfulness here. So as you come forward for communion today, I want to invite you into one of the spiritual legacies that you have--it may be one that you're now aware of yet. This is the

teaching of St. Ignatius, and his spiritual exercises. St. Ignatius--that incredible saint that has helped many of us live lives that are more intentional, in discerning God's call to us. Ignatius says, there's sort of a three-fold path to building the household. The first step, is to count our blessings. Count your blessings. You know, a lot of us come to church, because we have a little "repair work" to do. I know none of you do--but I do--every Sunday. And when I come before the altar, I bring some of my brokenness, some of my hopes and dreams, to God...and say "Lord, You take it. I tried, and it's not working. You help." And that's O.K.

But another way we come to the altar, is in gratitude. And Ignatius says: **Count your blessings**. Just by keeping track of your blessings, you begin to see differently. Your eyes of faith--the lens of faith that you have--as you count your blessings, you start to see more, not less. Most things you count, you run out of. But blessings, as you start to count them, you see more and more and more. Blessings build on themselves, and you are completely blessed. As you begin counting, you'll see that.

But then Ignatius says...a mental exercise of counting is not enough. The next step is to let them be received. So **receive those blessings into your heart**. And if you've ever tried this spiritual exercise, it's profound. You count a blessing, and you become very aware of it. And then literally imagine that it moves to your heart. Out of your mind...into your heart. It's amazing what happens. Your heart will open...open to the world. There's no way, when you count your blessings and let them settle into your heart--receive them into your heart--there's no way to hold your heart off from the world. It naturally opens! Because that's how God designed your spiritual heart, and my heart...to open. So Ignatius calls us into a spiritual exercise of reflection, that counts the blessing, and receives it into our heart. Try it. Your heart will open...open to the world.

And there Ignatius says that the only way to really activate the love of Christ within us, is to do that--count and receive. Because then, the next step will be to **offer ourselves to others**...that love is really primarily expressed in action, says Ignatius. Action...that offering of ourselves to the world, and to others.

You know, it's fascinating to imagine the reality of life in Palestine, 2000 years ago--especially from the reality that we live with here. Because we are now in a society that has more food per day than we can eat. We have more calories generated within all of our food farming system, than we can actually consume. And yet, people are hungry...people are hungry. So it's more important now, than ever, that we as inheritors of this wisdom tradition from Jesus and Ignatius, and others...this faith alive in practice...that we count our blessings...that we don't diminish what God is doing for us, in the abundance we have, as if we're embarrassed by it...that we embrace it, that we love it. I learned that lesson working with the ex-offenders, in Bridgeport, Connecticut for five years. Boy, anytime I kind of downplayed a blessing, my clients were all over me, for being ungrateful. "Take the blessing, Bill!," they would say...enjoy it...are you crazy?

So we count those blessings...and we receive them into our hearts. And then our hearts open, and the question of St. Ignatius then is...**how will we become a blessing**

**to others?** That's the fun part of being in a household. Because we see other people doing it, and they invite us into action ourselves.

Every Wednesday now, I have this blessing. I'm going to count it with you. I walk past our Food Pantry, that feeds hungry people every day--except Sunday. Sunday, you gotta' come to this meal. So we feed 15,000 people here, a year. It came out of a prayer group - our Cornerstone prayer group. They were praying, and had a heart for hungry folks around, and began to feed...about 20 years ago. Recently, on Wednesdays, we have some parishioners who decided...let's cook. Let's cook a meal, instead of handing a meal, or handing a food ticket for a prepared meal. Let's prepare one here. So Heidi Rose, and some others in our Food Pantry, started to cook.

Now usually, when you start to cook, most people have a recipe in mind--the outcome. And then they get the stuff, and then cook. But Heidi and her group, does it differently. They start with what they have, what's available, what's at the Oregon Food Bank, what's in our kitchen, what's left over from last night. Remember Jesus feeding the 5000? The disciples said "Oh--we can't buy enough food for them!" "Well, what do we have...let's feed them." "You do it," he said. No one said that to Heidi, and her band of blessing folks...they just did it. One of the most popular meals now, on Wednesdays, is of course, macaroni and cheese, grilled broccoli...fresh...some fruit and some other stuff. Sometimes, I'm walking off to a fancy lunch, and I look, and it's "HmMMM." Do you know how much that meal costs...one of the most popular meals? 11 cents. 11 cents a person. People here are feeding...get 200 or so, on Wednesdays...people who are hungry...11 cents!

Then they started looking at the costs. Most of the cost was in the take-away materials...the cup, the spoon and fork. So they had this great idea: invite them in! Use our stuff. So now, on Wednesdays--once a month right now (and they're going to move to once a week)--they're invited in! And here's the thing: you all are invited too! They've invited us. The one household rule is that, we have to eat with our guests who are there...can't take the food and run. No, you have to be in community...together...facing each other around the table. That's the household rule from 2000 years ago, and as we worship with those values, they circle back around and around.

Within this past generation, there has come a psychological understanding from Erik Erikson, that one of the only ways we can move fully into life, is through generativity. It's a stage that comes...what is it--mid-forties, mid-fifties?...when we're called to give to the world. And if we move through that psychological developmental step, then we can move on to integrity.

So whether you accept modern psychology as your wisdom statement, or you accept the ancient practices of our faith tradition... ***we are called to share the blessing, to count them, receive them, and then share the blessing and be a blessing to others.*** Today, on this Sunday when we receive eight beautiful, gorgeous children into our household--the household of God... Today--more than ever--let's go deep into our guts, and make a decision that we will count our blessings, that we will receive them deeply,

and that we will become that blessing to others. And now, we have eight more beautiful children who join us in this effort.