

Matt. 14:13-21

## Fed By God

The Rev. Patrick S. Cheng\*  
Metropolitan Community Church of New Haven  
July 31, 2005

Good morning. I'm delighted to be back at MCC New Haven and to encounter God's Word with you. Today's reading is the familiar miracle story about Jesus feeding over five thousand people from just five loaves of bread. As you know, bread plays an important role in the Bible and within the Christian tradition. The ancient Israelites were fed in the wilderness by manna. Bread was sacrificed to God and kept in the sanctuary of the Temple. Jesus teaches us how to pray -- by asking for our daily bread from God. And we gather here every week to break bread together, to remember Jesus' last supper with his disciples.

As the child of Chinese-American immigrants, I always have a funny reaction when I hear about bread. Growing up in a fairly traditional household, we never had bread around the house. It was always rice. "Give us this day our daily rice" would actually make a lot more sense to me as a prayer. Even my lunches didn't have bread in it. My mom would prepare all kinds of exotic dishes for me to bring to school, but no bread. In fact, I remember that I would look longingly at the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches of my classmates in elementary school.

I remember coming home one day and asking my mom if I could bring a sandwich to school. The next day, I opened up my lunch bag, and, lo and behold, I found two slices of bread. I was so excited! But there was no lunch meat or PB&J to go with the bread -- just some canned sardines with tomato sauce. At least my mom was trying. Several decades later, as a grown man, I still don't eat a lot of bread. But that's more because of the gay male low-carb culture than anything.

Anyway, if you stop and think about it, today's gospel reading is more than just a story about bread. It's really about what feeds us in our lives. Multitudes of people followed Jesus to a lonely place. Many of them were ill -- either physically, mentally, or emotionally -- and he had pity on them, and he fed them spiritually. And when they were hungry, he fed all of them with five loaves of bread and two fish. (I don't suppose the fish were sardines, but who knows?)

What is it that feeds you and makes you whole? For me, sometimes it is literally food. Growing up in my Asian-American household, I remember always celebrating important occasions with food. There is still something about dim sum in Chinatown or

---

\* Copyright © 2005 by Patrick S. Cheng. All rights reserved.

an authentic Chinese meal that is food for my soul. Other things feed me too. There's my husband, Michael -- we just celebrated fourteen wonderful years together on Wednesday. There are my friends in the gay men's chorus, my theology books and Hebrew and Greek Bible software (I can be such a nerd sometimes!), and working out, taking care of my body, and nurturing the erotic in my life. We all have things that feed us in our lives.

The interesting thing, however, is that sometimes we forget where this feeding comes from. It's really easy for me to think that it's all about me. After all, I'm the one who earns the money that buys the dim sum. I'm the one who placed the ad in *Bay Windows* that attracted Michael back in 1991, and I charmed him on our first date. I'm the one who auditioned for the gay men's chorus, I'm the one who bought the books and software, and I'm the one who lifts weights and does cardio.

But as today's reading reminds us, it's not about us. It's about recognizing that God is the one who does the feeding. In ancient Israel, bread was a theological symbol for this idea. Without rain from God, and without good crops from God, there would be no bread. As the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn has written, you can gaze deeply into a single flower and see the entire cosmos within it -- the clouds that produced the rain that watered it, the sunshine, minerals, earth, air, and so on. Similarly, you can gaze deeply into a piece of bread and see the entire handiwork of God within -- the clouds, rain, and sunshine, and also the people who worked to harvest the grain, the bakers who made the bread, the grocers who sold the bread, and so on.

Just as Jesus feeds the people who are hungry in today's gospel, it's God who feeds us in our lives. God's handiwork is in the food that we eat, just as God is present in our relationships with our families, friends, and loved ones, and in the things that we love to do. And for that we should be grateful and feel blessed.

It doesn't just end, however, once we've recognized the ways in which God works in our lives, and we've given thanks for those gifts. Today's gospel also calls us, as disciples of Christ, to go out into the world and feed others who are hungry. Did you notice that, after Jesus blessed the food, he wasn't the one who gave the food to the people? Rather, Jesus gave the food to the disciples, and it was the disciples who distributed it to the people. As LGBT people of faith, we are called to feed those of our sisters and brothers who are hungry, lonely, and ill. Once we have recognized the miracles that God has worked in our lives, we are called in turn to work miracles in the lives of others.

Two days ago, I was invited to participate on a panel at a groundbreaking summer program in Brooklyn designed specifically for LGBT Asian American youth. It was amazing to see these teenagers wrestle with issues of sexuality, race, and social justice at such a young age. When I told them that I had come out at the age of 17, they were actually amazed at how old that was -- some of them had come out in junior high school at the age of 12 or 13! How things have changed in the last twenty years since I first came out.

Anyway, I felt that the program itself was nothing short of a miracle. I was fed deeply by the presence of these youths and my fellow queer Asian panelists. It gave me hope that God was in fact working in this world. And, in turn, I felt blessed to feed them -- hopefully as a role model, and as someone who seeks wholeness by weaving together aspects of sexuality, race, and spirituality in his life.

I'd like to close with a wonderful Latin American prayer that is particularly appropriate for today's gospel reading. The prayer says:

*O God,  
To those who have hunger, give bread.  
And to those who have bread, give a hunger for justice.*

May you gaze deeply in the bread and fruit of the vine later this morning and see the entire universe -- the Body of Christ -- within. May you be fed by those gifts, and may they give you strength to go out into the world and, in turn, feed others who are hungry.

Amen.