



Poland Presbyterian Church

*At the Green since 1802*

2 Poland Manor  
Poland, Ohio 44514  
330-757-1547

**August 3, 2014**

**18th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Matthew 14:22-33

The Rev. Robbin Del Nagro

**“Bread of Life”**

Today's gospel reading is one of our most treasured stories in the life of Jesus. We treasure this story because we put ourselves into the crowd and in the crowd we transcend the ordinariness of our lives and enter a place where the simplest of foods becomes heavenly food, where the simplest of trust becomes filled with an outpouring of abundance such as cannot be explained other than with the words, mystery and miraculous.

Last Sunday we heard Jesus describe the Kingdom of Heaven, but in this reading he makes the Kingdom of Heaven real to the people. Last Sunday we heard how things like sand can be transformed into pearls, how a little mustard seed can be transformed into a bush for birds to nest, how spoiled bread can be transformed into food for thousands and now, in this event following his teaching he takes five ordinary loaves of bread and two little fish and makes it enough for more than 5,000 persons.

But in between last Sunday's reading and today's miracle something very important has occurred. Herod has beheaded John the Baptist. The news reaches Jesus and he is filled with grief. He wants to be alone to grieve and so he goes to a deserted place and gets into a boat and takes it out to an even more deserted place. He goes to be alone to pray and probably to weep. That is what all of us do when we have experienced a great loss. We have all experienced great losses, not only in the distant past, but in the past year here at Poland Presbyterian Church.

Jesus wants to process his loss but when he returns to that desolate place where his boat had put in, he finds that great crowds have followed him there. We don't know how long they have been waiting there. We don't know what time of day it was when he returned and found them gathered, but he knew what they wanted. They wanted the illness among them to be cured. These people wanted Jesus so much and they wanted healing so much that they brought their sick with them and kept going until they found the place where Jesus had put out in the boat. They didn't even take time to bring food. They wanted Jesus to take action in the midst of their daily struggles. Jesus saw this and had compassion. Jesus put aside his own grief and turned outward toward the needs of others. And in doing so he also healed himself.

This crowd was so eager to find Jesus that they left home, probably not dreaming that they would have to go so far into the wilderness or that they would stay so long. But when the evening came the disciples wanted to close up shop and send the people away, into the town to feed themselves. Probably it was a good distance they would have had to go, all on an empty stomach. But Jesus never sends people away. Jesus asks us, not what we need – he knows that already – but what we have.

The disciples didn't think they had very much. Five loaves of bread and two fish might have begun to feed the twelve of them but not very well. Jesus asks for it all and they give it all to him. Then Jesus takes their offering and turns it into something beyond their imaginings. He doesn't feed the people for them, but he makes what they bring into enough and gives it back so that they can feed the people.

Jesus has done that for us here at Poland Presbyterian Church. He has come to us in our loss and healed our sickness. He has seen our need for leadership and has taken what we have had to offer – eighteen very able elders, a whole lot of caring deacons, and one meager preacher – and made them into the leadership you have needed. It wasn't too complicated – he fed us simple food – God's word, Jesus' life and teachings and the Holy Spirit to empower. This is not just a Bible story, this is our story.

This story doesn't end when our tummies are full. It continues to repeat itself over and over again as we continue to offer ourselves and what meager gifts we have trusting that Jesus will multiply those gifts into an overflowing abundance of what we truly need. Jesus takes what we give and shows his gratitude to the father as he did with the loaves and fishes by giving thanks. Then he breaks our gifts apart and multiplies them. He breaks us apart and makes us more than we were before we offered ourselves to him. Then he gives and he gives and he gives – from our simple gifts, he gives us so much more. He gives until our need is satisfied and then picks up the left over pieces we have left behind to use again for another day.

We are about to join our hearts together in love once more around this communion table that has become so familiar to us. Once again we will take simple bread and drink and offer it to Jesus and once again he will take our gifts and give back to us spiritual gifts that bind us together as one body – gifts overflowing – his very presence among us. We give ourselves to Jesus and he gives us back our souls, restored, sanctified, and satisfied. Amen.