



**7th Sunday after Pentecost  
“How Much Does It Cost?”  
July 31, 2011**

**Texts: Isaiah 55:1-5; Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21; Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14:13-21**

*Prayer: Bless this word proclaimed, and we who hear it O Lord,  
that our hearts may be fed in you. Amen.*

As I begin, I want you to think of things in life that are free. Air. God’s grace. Friendship. Hugs. What about some of the offers received in the mail? Are any of those free? To name a few: buy nine items, get the tenth item free. Or receiving a free credit card offer in the mail.

There are things in life that appear to be free, that usually have a string attached in some way or the other to them. Last year, we received an offer for a “free” vacation – until we bought into the timeshare that went with it. The other day, I received in the mail a key for a free car – tax, title, and tag extra. The best one was the free dinner – if we signed up for a new credit card offer.

Free is a recurring theme in our lessons today. First, in Isaiah there is the invitation to “come, all who are thirsty! You who have no money, come, buy, and eat!” For Isaiah’s audience, this invitation is good news. Having been in exile for years, they were now able to return. The problem was, money and resources were scarce – so scarce that even water, a natural resource had to be purchased. Others, who had access to bread and milk, proceeded to sell these items at higher prices in order to make a living for themselves. Still others sold imitation items rather than the real thing. Eating “fake” items such as bread or milk can leave one feeling empty, if not satisfied. After all, who wants to eat a piece of paper, when one has a taste for a hamburger?

The invitation to eat, without cost, without price was good news for the remaining tribes of Israel. They had no money, and nothing of which to support themselves. Now, here was an invitation to come, eat, be satisfied, and to eat for FREE!!

Free also shows up in our Gospel today. A crowd comes to hear Jesus, in what Matthew records the location to be as a “deserted place”. This place is lonely, uninhabited, and so far off the beaten path, that the various options for eating we have along Route 30 did not exist!

Jesus goes to this place, to rest, to retreat, and given that this part of Matthew’s gospel occurs after the death of John the Baptist, probably also to mourn and grieve the death of his cousin and friend. This time apart is short lived as the crowds follow Jesus. And Jesus, has compassion on them. He heals them. He cares for them. Jesus sets aside his own need for rest and self care. Throughout the day, more people come. As they come, the place overflows with people.

The disciples become concerned. The day is ending. Many in the crowd have been there since the early morning hours. Food is not available. The disciples do what makes sense to them. They approach Jesus and say, ‘send them away, for there is nothing to eat.’ After all, if the crowds came to see Jesus, then Jesus should be the one to take care of them!

Jesus has other plans. He asks the disciples to feed the crowds. When they show the little that they have – five loaves of bread and two fish, Jesus acts on it. Now, if this were up to us, my hunch is there might be some rolling of the eyes, some shaking the head in disbelief, maybe even some muttering that “this will have to do”. More importantly, there would be much prayer that this little amount would be enough for everyone to have even a little.

Jesus does none of that. He invites the crowds to sit down. Then he takes the fish and the loaves, looks to heaven, blesses and breaks the fish and the loaves of bread. *And all ate and were satisfied.*

The best part of this meal was that it too was FREE. There was no admission, no cover charge, no strings attached, or any extra offers with it, not even a tip. Instead, it was free, spontaneous, without charge.

This is the very same way God’s grace is daily offered to us. Not because of what we do or do not do. Rather, God’s grace is extended to us because God loves us and God chooses to love and care for us.

It has often been said within the Christian community that community is a matter of one beggar telling one another where to find food. Like Jesus, we come, seeking rest, seeking relief from the worries of the past week, seeking to find refreshment, relaxation, and renewal. And, like the crowd in Mathew’s Gospel, we gather this morning as a community. We gather as a community that is hungry, seeking to be fed. We gather as a community, hurting, and wanting to be healed. We gather, seeking also the grace and the gift to be fed and satisfied.

In a few minutes, we come, to share, and to celebrate the reality that in the bread and wine, our hunger and thirst for God will be satisfied. Our hunger and thirst will be satisfied – not as the world thinks with large portions and super sizes. Rather, a little bit of bread, and a little bit of wine, blended with God’s Word to feed us, strengthen us, to nourish us, “for the facing of these days”. I find it interesting, in all the years I have served as communion assistant, and now in the short time as pastor, that in the bread and wine so freely offered and given, no one has ever commented about not receiving enough. There may have been comments about the piece of bread being too big, or the taste of the wine being too sweet, or too dry. Never have I heard a comment about receiving too little.

Therein is the beauty of God’s grace. God does not simply give us enough. God chooses instead to give us more than enough: more fish, more bread than we can possibly know what to do with. In that abundance, is the grace, and the gift to share with others that which we have first been given, and more than we can possibly deserve.

Brothers and sisters, COME! Let us break bread together; and let us eat for now the feast is spread; that our hungry hearts may be satisfied with the greatest price being FREE!!

Thanks be to God! Amen!