

February 25

“When Supplies are Scarce”

Feeding the 5000

Scripture Focus: Matthew 14:16-18

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17 “We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered.

18 “Bring them here to me,”he said.

Special Music:

“Everything”

Lauren Daigle

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqvV_iQW4O0&list=RDzqvV_iQW4O0&start_radio=1

WHATCHA GOT?



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Mathew 14:14-21

14 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

15 As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.”

16 Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

17 “We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered.

18 “Bring them here to me,” he said.

19 And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people.

20 They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.

21 The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

HOW QUICKLY DO WE GIVE UP

How quickly do we give up
When we feel we don't have enough
To meet the needs
Dropped at our feet.
How quickly we turn away
And seek out some other way
Rather than put our trust in God
Fearing the path where angels trod
Believing we may be thought fools
If we offer up our miniscule
Portions and pieces and parts,
Ignoring God's abundant heart
And Creation's redundant stores
Which overflow forevermore.

A shepherd's staff
To quell Pharaoh's wrath.
God's given creed
To stifle our greed.
A little oil, a little flour
That overflows with each passing hour
Allowing us to step into blessings
Knowing we are dressed in
The glories of God
The abundance of God
Understanding when he says
Our ways are not his ways.

Five loaves and two fish
To serve as an abundant dish
To thousands of people
Outside the temple's steeple.
Just when we believe we don't have enough,
God steps in to gently rebuff
Our disbelief
And provide relief
To the hungry people everywhere,
Showing that he abundantly cares
Even when we don't.
Even when we won't
Accept his mercy and his grace.
As we stand here face to face
With the Creator of our souls

Our pantries are full
As God gently pulls
Us away from our self-sustaining
Attitudes of remaining
In control of our soul,
Taking away our cruise control
And rearranging our priorities.
Bringing us back to sobriety
As we rest in the blessed hands
Of the one who truly understands
Our needs.

I want take a minute and read a little bit of John's version of the feeding of the 5000. In the 6th chapter of John we get some important information that we do not find in Matthew or Mark.

5 When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"

6 He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

7 Philip answered him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

8 Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up,

9 "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

I read this passage to go along with our scripture from Matthew because we are able to gain some greater insight by remembering that we need to put the things we read in scripture into context. By doing so, we gain a greater understanding of the events. Its a lot like looking at an event through multiple eyes, knowing that one person may see something that no one else notices. And, John's sharp eyes here give us a handle that helps us to better grasp the importance of this moment that goes beyond the miracle of feeding all those people.

I do not want to detract from the miracle where Jesus feeds this multitude, a great many more than 5000. They only counted the men that day. We don't

have any idea how many people were there if we included all the women and children. While all three gospels agree that the disciples came up with five loaves of bread and two fish, only John tells us where the bread and fish came from. All three gospels tell us that the disciples wanted to send the people away so that they could go get something to eat. All three gospels tell us that Jesus told his disciples to feed them themselves. But only John tells us that there was a boy there that had five loaves and two fish. And only John tells us that that Jesus was testing Phillip by saying, **“Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?”**

I know you are thinking, “Why does that matter, preacher? The miracle here is that Jesus blessed the loaves and fish and fed all those people with many baskets of food left over. That’s the miracle. That’s the point of the story. Isn’t it?”

My years in the theatre taught me a great many lessons. Yes, I learned how to make an audience laugh, or cry, or cringe, or worry, or just feel good. I learned how to wow an audience with special effects or move their souls with music and ambiance. In other words, I learned how to manipulate people into feeling what I wanted them to feel when I needed them to feel it. In a way, it’s kind of like a theme park ride.

But I also learned an extremely important lesson that went hand-in-hand with those things. If I stood in the lobby after a performance and listened to people leaving the theatre and I heard comments like, “Oh, weren’t the lights wonderful!” “Those costumes were gorgeous.” “Did you notice how the set

made you actually feel like you were really there?” And, “Those special effects, well, they blew me away!” Then I knew that I had failed my audience. I had left them with empty astonishment rather than fed their souls. If they talked instead about how wonderful the characters were and how much they had enjoyed the production as a whole, if they felt moved, if they left the theatre willing to open their minds to the essence of and soul of the play and the playwright, then I had succeeded. The production should never be about the mechanics of the show, but about the message that the show is trying to present to the audience.

It's never about the flash, folks. It's not about the magic. And while Jesus did feed the multitude with five loaves and two fish, it was not about the miracle. It was about taking care of a need. It was not about sending people away, but about drawing them in. It wasn't about stagecraft. It was about reaching people where they were at that moment in time. The people were hungry and Jesus fed them. And yes, it was a miracle. But more importantly, it was about shepherding, ministering to the needs of the people.

“So, preacher” you might say, “how does John give us more insight?” Well, friends, it's about the boy. If we just read Matthew or Mark, we assume that the disciples went through everything they were carrying and found the bread and fish. But John lets us know that they didn't have to give up their own lunch. We don't even know if they looked through their own supplies. I don't know about you, but I find it extremely interesting to note that among all those thousands of adults, it was a boy who remembered to bring something to eat, someone who couldn't even be counted among the 5000 men.

And it was this boy who gave everything that he had to help out, never knowing how God was about to use his meager offering. I say meager, but that is a huge understatement when you consider no one else had anything at all to offer. We don't hear anyone thanking this boy. We don't hear anyone praising his generosity. But he didn't need that. The people were hungry, and he wanted to help meet that need. And Jesus blessed his generosity with overwhelming abundance. Abundance not to fill his own need, but to fill the needs of everyone there.

I think the real miracle here is the life-changing moment in this boy's life as God used him to fulfill a purpose he never knew he had. When this boy packed his lunch, he had no idea about what was about to happen, how the Creator of the Universe was about to use him to meet the needs of thousands. Don't you know that he felt beyond blessed standing inside the miracle with Jesus. While the disciples complained about how they couldn't figure out how to meet the need, this boy doesn't question it at all. He simply gives what he has, knowing that it isn't enough to begin to feed all those people. He gives only knowing that there is a need, probably with the expectation that he would be one among many. One of Jesus' greatest miracles blossoms out of this small boy's selflessness, a boy whom we take for granted and seldom talk about when we discuss this empirical moment. Take a long minute and think about that.

16 Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

17 "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.

18 “Bring them here to me,”he said.

Talk about taking the wind out of someone’s sails. Matthew’s version says, **“We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish.”** Wait a minute. The disciples didn’t have five loaves of bread and two fish. We don’t know where that bread and those fish came from if we don’t compare notes with John. No. This boy has only five loaves of bread and two fish. In John’s remembrance, it says, **“Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”** Without John’s version we wouldn’t even know of this boy’s existence or how his gift became the foundation of this miracle. And we never hear about this boy again. One small, unnamed boy’s selfless act changed the lives of thousands of people.

But so often, we are like the disciples. We see the meagerness of our offering and feel embarrassed and inadequate in standing in an overwhelming moment, with our hand holding that gift out to Jesus and saying, “Jesus, this is all I have. I don’t know how it can help. The demands are so much greater than what I have to offer. I feel foolish even bringing this to you. And please know that it isn’t even ours. We took it from that small boy over there.”

I have this picture in my head of Jesus looking where they are pointing and seeing the boy, giving him a knowing nod and a smile. And the boy smiling back as he shares that moment with Jesus. But do know that’s just me envisioning that moment in my head. There is no scripture to back it up. Having that thought race through my brain reminds me of how important it is for us to have a

relationship with Jesus as he gives us a knowing look when we actually begin to understand what is happening.

Unfortunately, those moments don't happen as often as they should. Not because Jesus isn't looking our way and smiling, but because we are too distracted to notice, too worried about our problems, too confused by the chaos that surrounds us. We put the world into our own small understanding of the universe and think we have it all figured out. We believe that we can't make a square peg fit a round hole. We allow ourselves to be discouraged to the point that we might even try to hide the insignificant nature of our gift. We think to ourselves that we can't possibly feed all these people, so we'll just keep what we have to ourselves. That way we won't be embarrassed before God and our friends. And besides that, what we have is so insignificant, it will never be missed. No one will ever even think twice about it.

1 Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The Lord did not appear to you'?"

2 Then the Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?"

"A staff," he replied.

3 The Lord said, "Throw it on the ground."

"The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest.

He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain.

And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’”

“As surely as the Lord your God lives,” she replied, “I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.”

16 Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

17 “We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered.

18 “Bring them here to me,” he said.

Whatcha Got?

Do you have a staff? Put it to work. I can do great things with a staff!

Do you have overflowing barns? Put that overflow to work. I can do great things with that overflowing abundance. I gave it to you for a reason.

Do you have a little flour and some oil? Put it to work. I'm not going to let you run out, and my children need it!

Do you have some fish and some bread? Don't worry about how many mouths there are! Put it to work. I will take care of the rest.

Our willingness to let go of what God has blessed us with is key to letting God use what he has allowed to us in our stewardship. Our time, our money, our possessions, our talent, our education, and our spiritual gifts are all meant to move the Kingdom of God forward as we return them to his hands when he tells us that he needs them.

This week, as we continue in our mirrored reflection during this Lenten season, let us work towards opening our hands and presenting all that God has given to us. Let us lay it all at the foot of the cross for Jesus' use. And as we do so, we will be an example to those around us of the blessings that come from gifting back to God the abundance that he has already blessed us with.

God bless you all.

AMEN

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