

A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church
By Chris Fillingham
“Leftovers”
John 6:1-13; Ephesians 3:14-21
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The story of the Jesus feeding the five thousand is one of our favorites. It's a great miracle. Jesus knows the crowds are hungry and he doesn't send them away. He invites them to stay, and then like the host of a dinner party, he begins the feast.

This meal is unique, isn't it? It's unique because we know that it is almost Passover time and here we have a picture of Jesus blessing the bread and feeding it to his followers... It's foreshadowing the sacred meal to come.

And it's also a picture of abundance. There is always enough for everyone at the Lord's Table. All are welcome. There is room for you when Jesus is the host.

But this story is unique for another reason. It is the only one of Jesus' miracles that is recorded in all four of the gospels. Which is to say, everyone knew about this miracle... everyone talked about it. It was one of those unique moments that was so genuinely moving that all four of our gospel writers were willing to spill ink to tell us about it. There's not another single miracle in that category.

But they don't all tell it the same way... They never do, which is why we need all four gospels, by the way. Each one gives us a different perspective, and even more importantly, each one is pointing to some different truths.

When you're reading a story like this, it can be helpful to read the other accounts, but not so we can blend them together. We read the other accounts to help us see what is different, what is unique in each gospel writer's version of the story... Sometimes those unique details will have a lot to say to us.

Well, John certainly has his own version of the miracle that happened that day. For John it all began when Jesus looked up and saw the crowd. He saw the mass of need that was headed his way and he brought it to the disciples' attention. He turns to Philip and asks. **“Well Philip, where in the world are we going to buy bread for all these people? What do you think?”**

It is a test for Philip, but it could have been a test for any of us. It's one of those questions that we are always struggling with, isn't it? How are we going to meet this need, and that need, and the one coming down the road? It seems we're always bombarded by somebody's need, and sometimes by 5,000 needs at once.

You pull up to the stoplight and there's a man standing there whose face is dirty, whose clothes are ragged, whose beard is long, and whose eyes are empty. He's holding a sign, “Hungry. Please help.” – Need staring you in the face.

You open your mailbox or pick up the telephone and there it is again. The March of Dimes, the home for battered woman, the local food pantry, and it's there again – Need.

You walk down the street... or you walk into the church and you never get away from it. There's always some need staring you in the face and as Christians we want to help, but there's just so much, it can get overwhelming.

So, when Jesus turns to me, like he turns to Philip, and asks, **“Where are we going to buy bread for all these people?”** I can't help but think he's asking too much.

Philip responds like we do most of the time, **“Jesus, we don't have enough to meet this need. It would take a whole year's wage to buy that much bread.”**

If you're paying attention, then you may have noticed that Philip didn't answer Jesus' question. Jesus is asking **“Where?”**, but Philip asks **“How?”** And most of the time that's where we stop. **“How, Jesus? We don't have enough money. We don't have enough time. We don't have enough energy.”**

It's not that we're trying to get out of helping... It's that we just don't see how it is possible. We only have limited resources... and some of us have *very* limited resources. And so it doesn't seem fair that Jesus would turn and ask *us the question*. But he does...

He asks Philip to test him... And he's asking each of us to test us. None of us get a “bi” on this one. He asks us “where?” because he knows we keep asking “how” when what we need to be asking is “where?”

The “Where?” of course is God, not us. And that's what we have to learn. We don't have enough, but our Creator God is a God of Abundance. And somehow we have to learn that deep in our bones. Somehow we have to trust that God is a God of Abundance.

***And the thing is, when our few resources
meet with God's great abundance,
miracles become possible.***

At this point Andrew introduces a little boy into the story... This is another part of the story that is unique to John.

It is a little boy who offers Jesus what he has. Five loaves of bread, two fish. It's not much really. It's probably not enough to even feed Jesus and the disciples, let alone feed the thousands who have gathered there. It's just a drop in the bucket...

but it's all this little boy has

and he gives it to Jesus.

“And a little child will lead them” the prophets said.

In my estimation, this little boy's gift is the first miracle in this story. It's not flashy. In fact the other three gospel writers don't even mention the little boy. But I'd say it was a miracle that this little boy was willing to offer Jesus what little he did have.

The disciples are standing around scratching their heads. Like most of us, they are looking at Jesus asking **“How?”** All the while this boy is opening up his lunch pail and dumping it out at the feet of Jesus...

It was a miracle because that's a dangerous thing to do in a crowd of hungry people. It's dangerous to give when you know there isn't enough... when you know you don't have enough to meet all those needs.

It's a whole lot safer to keep your pockets closed and your mouth shut.

I think most of the time, that's what we do. Because most of the time all we see is our *scarcity*... We're like Philip wondering if Jesus really expects us to meet this great need...

and we're like Andrew who looked at this boy's offering and said despairingly, **“How far will this go among so much need?”**

Sometimes the scarcity is so striking, we can't see anything else.

We look at our bank account and our bills, our income and our debts and we know we simply don't have enough. And that's the honest truth.

We look at our age. We look at our health and we think we aren't the ones... I'm too young. I'm too old.

We look at our calendars and schedules and the truth is, I just can't add one more thing.

We look at our ability to make a difference. We look at our training and experience and say, **“I don't know how. That's not for me.”**

Of course, all that very well may be true, but it's never the whole picture. So much of the time all we see is our *scarcity*.

All we see are our boundaries.

All we see are our limits.

But Jesus invites us to give him whatever we do have, even if it's not enough, even when we're afraid that we will fail or embarrass ourselves.

And who knows, perhaps we will... perhaps we will fail or embarrass ourselves along the way... and that's ok. Please hear that! It is ok to fail.

Our faith isn't placed in the outcome... It isn't about the results. We're not asked to have faith in the “what of things...” in what will happen. There is no guaranteed outcome in the risky journey of faith.

If we find ourselves asking **“What** can I expect to happen if I believe? or if I act?” then we're still trying to stay in control. We still haven't learned to trust God

Our faith isn't placed in the **“what of things”** but the **“Who”** of things. We're asked to believe despite the uncertainties and sometimes despite the results... because our faith is in a person, in a relationship, not in the outcomes.

We believe in a God who loves us and loves the world more than we ever have. We believe in a God who knows our needs better than we do.

This God is the “**Who**”

And this God is the “**where**” ...In God alone is there enough bread to feed all these people.

We don't have to feed them all. We're simply invited to be the little boy
who *empties* his lunch pail at the feet of Jesus.
who empties *everything he had*.
That's where the real miracle begins.

You see, when our few resources meet with God's great abundance, miracles become possible.

Well, thankfully the little boy was willing to do just that. Five loaves of bread and two fish. It wasn't much in the face of such need. It was almost laugh worthy.

But in the hands of Jesus it was enough.

That is the mystery of this story... and the mystery of the Gospel. What is not nearly enough becomes more than enough in the hands of Jesus.

Five loaves and two fish become a great banquet.

Twelve nobody disciples become the church

One sinful and broken life... my life, your life, given to Jesus becomes a blessing to the world.

This is what happens when we place ourselves in then hands of the resurrected One. What looks like endings becomes beginnings. What is obviously not enough becomes more than we could possibly ask or imagine.

You see, this story not only foreshadows the Last Supper, it's also hinting at the church: twelve baskets of leftovers? That number is no coincidence, is it? There were once twelve tribes of Israel... and there are the twelve disciples, who are both the new Israel and the coming church.

Which is to say, these twelve baskets are trying to tell us that this is how the church always comes into being. We give what we have to Jesus. We share it with one another and the world. And somehow out of that the church is born.

It's is an important reminder whenever we look at what we have and think it's not enough. That's when we have to remember this isn't our show, or even our church. This is God's church. And somehow in this place, our meager bread and fish can become altogether something more... a feast, even, with plenty of leftovers...

Because when our few resources are met with God's great abundance, miracles become possible.

And so, one struggling church sells its building and closes its doors... with no idea of what is next. Decades later that church is still going, blessing the world.

That one little church builds a well in Malawi, changing the lives of the people in that village forever.

And that church now feeds immigrants who have come to their town from all over the world.

That one church

Advocates for victims of human trafficking

Cares for the homeless

Provides Counseling for the hurting

Relief from disaster

hope to the hopeless

sacred space for the searching

peace for the troubled

community to the lonely... to name a few things.

All we have to do is offer our five little loaves of bread and two fish... And after awhile the sun will set and everyone's bellies will be full and somehow, in some unexplainable way, there will even be leftovers... Thanks be to God.
Amen.

Silent Reflection:

Father, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will.

Whatever you may do, I thank you: I am ready for all, I accept all.

Let only your will be done in me. I wish no more than this, O Lord.

Into your hands I commend my soul; I offer it to you with all the love of my Heart, for I love you Lord, and so need to give myself,

to surrender myself into your hands,

without reserve and with boundless confidence,

for you are my Father.

Foucauld – Desert Father

“There’s nothing more winsome, transformative, or healing than a congregation that loves one another, and extends its arms to welcome others.”

~Dr. Molly Marshall