I AM the Bread of Life 3/7 I AM Series
John 6:25-40
03 07 2010 Sam Jones Memorial UMC

Introduction

It had been a **good day** for Jesus and the disciples. The Twelve had returned from their very first preaching tour on their own. Jesus sent them out two-by-two to proclaim the gospel. The results were beyond all imagination. They healed the sick, exorcised the possessed, and proclaimed God's kingdom coming. The disciples returned to Jesus, bursting with the good news of all that had occurred.

However, Jesus was so busy that they barely had time to speak—much less eat. So the Lord said to them, *"Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."* They pushed a boat off the shore into the Sea of Galilee and sailed to a solitary place. Jesus and his friends were looking forward to spending some quiet time together.

But it was not to be. The crowds followed the boat along the shoreline. Word spread across the region and others joined the multitudes. By the time Jesus and the Twelve landed, thousands of people were expectantly awaiting them.

It would have been understandable if Jesus had been annoyed by this disruption of his plans for some well-deserved rest and refreshment. When the Lord saw the crowds, however, he was filled with **compassion**. The people were *"like sheep without a shepherd."* (Mark 6: 34). So the Lord took the opportunity to teach the crowds more about God's kingdom.

II. You Give Them Something to Eat

As evening approached, however, the disciples finally decided that enough was enough. They approached Jesus and said, *"This is a remote place, and it's already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."* No doubt in the back of the disciples' minds was also the thought, *"And WE can eat, too!"*

Jesus turned to Philip and asked, *"Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"* Then the author added for the reader's sake, *"Jesus asked this only to test Philip for he already had in mind what he was going to do."*

Philip looked at the crowd with dismay and replied, *"Eight months wages would not buy enough for each one to have a bite!"* If this was a pop test of faith, then Philip had failed. Granted, his answer appeared to be mathematically correct.

There are always those who will object to the Lord's challenge based on the grounds of practicality and possibility. And truth to tell, we need folk like that in the church. We need both dreamers with their heads in clouds and realists with their feet firmly planted on the ground.

Philip answered the Lord's question from a practical, worldly perspective. Yet it turned out that this was a trick question. You see, Philip forgot to factor into the equation the person who was asking the question. The Lord had already worked out the answer.

All of the gospel accounts agree that OVER 5,000 people were present. Actually this was not a precise count. The total included only the MEN present. Here is proof positive that the gospel writers were NOT Methodist ministers. A good Methodist preacher would have counted EVERYONE present—men, women, children, babies, and added one more for ever expectant mother present—and then added 10% in a ministerial estimate before rounding the total up to the nearest thousand! If I had been counting, the story would be known as *"The Feeding of the 10,000 . . . plus!"*

III. A Boy and His Lunch Box

At this point, **Andrew** interrupted. Andrew held a curious place among the Twelve Disciples. He was not included in the inner circle of Peter, James, and John. He always seemed to be overshadowed by his big brother. In fact, John identifies Andrew in the story as *"Simon Peter's brother."* Don't you know that Andrew LOVED that! However, Andrew was the one who originally introduced Peter to Jesus; and now he was bringing someone else to the Lord's attention.

Andrew said, *"Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish."* Then he looked at the crowd of five thousand—or ten thousand if I had been counting—and asked, *"But how far will they go among so many?"*

Here was a **young boy** whose mother had thought ahead to prepare him a sack lunch. It wasn't much. Barley bread was barely bread at all—it was the typical fare for poor peasants. The two fish were probably similar to small sardines. The boy's sack supper hardly provided the fixings for one fish sandwich.

Yet Jesus graciously accepted the poor gift with the same spirit in which it was given. Then the Lord did something that the disciples would later recall during their **Last Supper** together—and we will recall later this morning when we celebrate The **Lord's Supper**. He took the bread, gave thanks to God, and gave it to the disciples. He did the same with the fish. Then he directed the disciples to distribute the food to the people.

To borrow a line from Paul Harvey, do you know *"the rest of the story?"* Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes so that there was enough food to feed the entire crowd—with TWELVE BASKETS filled with the leftovers. The event SO impressed the disciples that this is the ONLY miracle—other than the Resurrection itself—that was recorded in ALL FOUR GOSPELS.

The miracle began with a young boy who was willing to share what little he possessed. Out of the four gospels, only John included this detail; however, I think it is a vital part of the story. This poor child with a sack lunch didn't have much to offer—but he was willing to share what he had with the Lord.

God honors our willingness to give more than our ability to serve. Yes, sometimes the Holy Spirit calls the equipped but often times the Lord equips the called. The Lord God Almighty, the maker of the heavens and the earth, has all of creation's resources at his command. What Christ requires are children of faith who will step forward and say, "*I have five loaves and two fish—it's not much, but you can have it all."*

This is the type of spirit that God can employ for divine service. Oftentimes the results are beyond all human imagination. But it begins with a willingness to give

whatever we possess for Christ's service—even if it is nothing more that five barley loaves and two fish.

IV. I AM the Bread of Life

The little boy's human willingness to give was matched by Christ's divine ability to multiply. Something amazing took place that evening on a Galilean hillside. The five loaves and two fish fed over 5,000—or 10,000 if I had been counting. The Gospel writers also make sure to note that there were plenty of leftovers afterwards. God not only met but also exceeded the need.

Here's an important spiritual principle: you cannot out give God. Whatever we give to the Lord's service is multiplied miraculously beyond all human expectation. In Luke 6: 38, Jesus said: *"Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*

It's a bit like . . . **ice cream!** I LOVE ice cream. I like to eat it until my tongue is frozen, and I talk funny. My favorite is the **"Ice Dream**" cups and cones at Chik-Fil-A restaurants. Someone once told me that as far as ice cream goes that the "Ice Dream" is relatively healthy for you. So I always order a LARGE cup—I mean, your health is everything, right?

I like to watch the "Ice Dream" cup prepared. The clerk fills it to the very top in a circular motion. Then the true professionals will THUMP the cup so that the contents settle to the bottom. Then they will fill it back up again.

The measure you give is the measure you receive. The world believes that there is only so much ice cream to go around. Hoard what you have or others will take it. Mine is mine and yours is mine if you're not careful.

However, Jesus taught us that the more we give, the more we receive. Love is not a quantifiable substance that can be used up. Instead, the more we love and give, the more we are loved and receive in turn. Simple acts of kindness, mercy, forgiveness, and love are returned to us many fold. God blesses us to the point of overflowing. Then the Lord THUMPS the cup and gives us even more.

Conclusion

Following the feeding of the 5,000—or 10,000 if I was counting—Jesus recalled for the people how God had fed the Israelites in the wilderness with bread from heaven. The people called it "**manna**" which in Hebrew literally means "What is it?" I have attended a few covered dish dinners when I have found myself asking the same question.

Manna possessed a curious characteristic. While God provided plenty for the people's daily needs, it could not be stored. Those who tried to hoard it found that the heavenly manna quickly rotted. The Israelites learned they had to depend upon God for their daily bread.

Jesus culminated the lesson by proclaiming, ***"I AM the bread of life!"*** The Lord meets our every need, and we learn to depend upon God's all sufficient grace. When we

ask*, "Give us this day our daily bread"* it is both a petition for help and an affirmation of faith. We offer ours entire being up to God in the sure knowledge the Lord will care for us both now and forevermore.

If we offer ourselves to God then there is no telling what might happen. A human willingness to give added to the divine ability to multiply can result in something beyond our imagination. 5 loaves plus 2 fish equal 1 miracle recorded in all 4 Gospels.

Today as we recall how Jesus fed the 5,000—or 10,000 if I had been counting—it is appropriate that we continue our worship by celebrating the **Lord's Supper**. On a Galilean hillside, Jesus took bread, gave thanks to God, and gave it to his disciples. Months later in the Upper Room, Jesus took the bread, gave thanks to God, broke it, gave it to his disciples and said, *"This is my body given for you."* Today we remember Jesus' command to *"Do this in remembrance of me"* as we reenact our Lord's words and actions.

As we receive the elements of loaf and cup, remember that we serve a God of wonders. Stand among the amazed 5,000—or 10,000 if I had been counting—as you receive the bread blessed by our Lord. And remember that the human willingness to give combined with the divine ability to multiply always results in miracles. We come to the Lord's Table this day in the name of the One who said, ***"I AM the bread of life."***