

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

August 6, 2023 (Proper 13, Year A)
Matthew 14:13-21

A man was unpacking a shipment of food for the poor people of Appalachia. The food had been collected from an elementary school. He was separating beans from powdered milk, and canned vegetables from canned meats. Reaching into a box filled with various cans, he pulled out a little brown paper sack. Apparently one of the kids had brought something different from the items on the suggested list. Out of the paper bag fell a peanut butter sandwich, an apple, and a cookie. Crayoned in large letters was a little girl's name, "'Christy -- Room 104.' Christy had given up her lunch for a hungry person.

That's what happened that day with the multitudes. Jesus said, "YOU give them something to eat," and, as we learn from St. John's version of this story, a child LITERALLY gave up his lunch.

We can imagine what the disciples were THINKING. "Jesus, what do you MEAN, 'YOU give them something to eat?' This wasn't a planned event! There are no volunteers, no coordinators, no planning meetings, no committees and no sign-up sheets. How are we supposed to feed 5,000 men? And that's not COUNTING the women and children. Why, there could be 10,000 people here. How are WE supposed to feed ALL of them? All we have are these five loaves and two fish. How can we feed ALL THOSE PEOPLE with SO LITTLE?"

And Jesus simply smiles as if to say, "It is enough," then He reaches out his hands and says, "Bring them to me."

The disciples must have been panicked. All they had were five loaves and two fish. And they weren't even big. They were a boy's lunch. They were the kind of thing a person would carry with them on a journey, like a snack. What they had was like five breadsticks and two cans of sardines. But Jesus took those loaves and fish and made enough to feed more than 10,000 people. Fed them until they were "SATISFIED," it says, an entire MEAL'S worth. It was a miracle.

But this miracle wasn't just something that happened a LONG TIME ago. We can't read this and say, "Well, that's a nice story, but what does that have to do with ME?" This MIRACLE is NOT some ISOLATED EVENT in HISTORY; it's a demonstration of HOW JESUS WORKS. Jesus' miracle is STILL HAPPENING TODAY.

I have served in small churches, wondering HOW we were going to pay a bill due at the end of the week. And incredibly, during the week, an envelope would come in the mail with a check for exactly (I'm NOT EXAGGERATING) EXACTLY, the amount needed to pay that bill. No one outside the office KNEW how much was needed, but there it was. GOD knew what was needed, and the Lord PROVIDES. I've seen that happen TOO many times to be a coincidence. The Lord provides.

And God ALWAYS works THROUGH PEOPLE. The story rings true today as much as it did back then. He worked through OTHERS that day, and He STILL DOES. Jesus DEPENDS on US. He NEEDS us and USES us. If Jesus wants something done, He works through a PERSON to do it. If He wants a child taught or a person helped, He works through PEOPLE to get it done. Christ chooses to have his disciples, his CHURCH, US, carry ON his work.

It's easy to be intimidated and discouraged by the magnitude of the things God calls us to do. Our resources often don't SEEM like they're ENOUGH. But all the DISCIPLES had were five loaves and two fish, and yet THAT was ENOUGH. Jesus said, "Bring them to me," and with WHAT they HAD, He made a miracle.

Jesus calls every one of us to tasks that seem impossible, that seem WAY beyond our abilities and resources. But all the Lord ever asks from us is what we DO have. He simply says, "Bring them to me." It doesn't matter how little we have to give. For Jesus, it's enough. He asks us to come to Him

JUST as we ARE; it doesn't matter how SMALL our gifts are. For Jesus, it's enough. You see, it's not the amount or the size of our gifts and abilities that make the DIFFERENCE; it's what JESUS can DO with them.

In the story we hear something familiar – Jesus took the loaves, and blessed them and broke them, and gave them for all to eat. (I hope you caught that in there.) It's the same pattern as our Lord's Supper. The gifts are presented, a prayer is said, and all are invited to eat the holy meal. We give to the Lord what the Lord has first given us, and God does something wonderful with it.

From ordinary bread and wine, He gives us his body and blood. From ordinary loaves and fish, Christ produces enough to feed more than 10,000 people. And from what WE bring to Jesus, He can make much, MUCH MORE from it. It doesn't matter WHAT, how much or how LITTLE we bring, Jesus will USE it in ways we couldn't DREAM of.

If Jesus can take bread and wine and turn them into the vehicles for forgiveness and life and salvation, then He can work wonders with OUR gifts as well. And He can do the same with our talents and abilities, and with our words...and with US.

God can do amazing things. My first church in North Dakota was a tiny church, with very little in resources. Their parsonage had fallen into disrepair. But they wanted to call a pastor, and they knew that in ORDER to call a pastor, they needed to fix UP their parsonage. They put the whole congregation to work. They put hundreds of hours of labor and thousands of dollars into the parsonage. If they had known before they began how much it was going to cost and how much work it was going to be, they probably would have been overwhelmed by it. They might not have even started. How could such a small parish pull together enough resources to do so much? But they did. They offered themselves and their time and they did it. They did more than they probably thought possible. And what they did was amazing. And people noticed. They even got on the news. The Minot station sent a crew out to do a story on them. And that house was beautiful. My wife and I were proud to call it our home. "Loaves and fish."

One of the reasons I came to First Lutheran is because I SEE this faith in you. You had the courage to build-on and renovate when so many other churches are circling the wagons. You are looking forward and outward when so many churches are turning inwards and lamenting the loss of the golden years. I've heard many stories about the COUNTLESS hours of volunteer time YOU put into building this sanctuary. It's countless because there were so MANY hours that you LITERALLY LOST COUNT. You stepped forward and OFFERED your small gifts, your loaves and fish, to Christ, and now EVERY person who walks BY and INTO this place says, "Wow, look what God is doing HERE." "Loaves and fish."

Right here within our midst, there is a ministry that takes its NAME FROM this story, "Loaves and Fishes." Look at the work we at First Lutheran are doing through this ministry.

(Show slide)



"Loaves and fish."

And look at the what is being accomplished by the Food Shelf here at First.

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Community Food Shelf Report

January 1 - June 28, 2023

568 households served

568 Adults

398 Seniors

260 children

March Food Drive brought in

3,637 pounds of food

'Rescue' food (food which we are able to purchase = 572 pounds

Thank you to the quilters for their quilt donations!



All of that is made possible by YOUR INDIVIDUAL GIFTS. “Loaves and fish.” And Christ multiplies it.

What need is Christ calling YOU to meet? What GIFTS has God given you? What are YOUR “five loaves and two fish”?

Perhaps you have some words of COMFORT to offer. There are so many people in our area who are in pain. There are people who are struggling financially. There are people grieving over the loss of a loved one or the break-up of their family.

We might say, “What can WE do about it? Compared to the MAGNITUDE of those problems, what DIFFERENCE can I make?”

When it comes down to it, all we REALLY have to give is OURSELVES – our PRESENCE and our WORDS of comfort. But JESUS says, “It is enough. Bring them to me.”

Those of you who have been THROUGH that pain know how much it can mean when someone stops by to see you, and to spend some time with you. “Loaves and fish.” The Lord takes our words and uses them to touch a person’s soul.

What are your “five loaves and two fish”? Do you have a few dollars? Offer it to Jesus. Offer it to one of the many ministries of our church, and Christ will multiply it.

Do you have a talent for working with children? Or for relating to youth? Offer it to Jesus. Use that talent to serve, and Christ will multiply it.

Do you have a talent for teaching? Do you have a talent for music? Are you skilled at working with your hands or building things? Are you good with words? Do you have new ideas for what the church can do? Offer them to Jesus, and HE will MULTIPLY it.

It doesn’t matter how small your gifts and talents are. It doesn’t matter if all you have is “five loaves two fish.” That’s enough, because the LORD PROVIDES. Bring them to Jesus, and HE will make the DIFFERENCE. Amen.