

The Feeding of the Five Thousand

John 6:1-15

Pastor Paul Anthes

John 6:1-15 After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. ² And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. ³ Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. ⁵ Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹ "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?" ¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." ¹³ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" ¹⁵ Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

Introduction: This well known miracle is recorded in a section of Scripture discussing the evidence that confirms Jesus' claims to be the Son of the one true God...therefore God. A claim to "be God" is not something anyone should take at face value...and Jesus knew that. If a person appears in our day saying that he is God, most people will rightly say he is mad.

The gospel accounts offer historical evidence, using the commonly accepted rules of testimony that were in force in that day. Jesus knew His own personal testimony did not carry much weight with the religions Jews, but they had accepted John the Baptist as a prophet from God and John pointed to and singled out Jesus as the Messiah. Added to that.... hundreds of people heard God speak from heaven, saying, "this [Jesus] is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased...listen to Him!" And...there is the cumulative prophecy of several thousand years. Prophecy so specific that it was impossible not to identify Jesus as the Christ.

But all of this fell on deaf ears. The religious leaders of Christ's day determined not to receive any of the testimony regarding the deity and Messiahship of Jesus Christ. They rejected Christ's words along with all other testimony...including the testimony of God and the Scripture. Knowing this, Christ offered an avalanche of miraculous signs that no one was able to deny or explain including the hard hearted religious leaders. Their attitude was summed up in John 10:

John 10:25-33 ²⁵ Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one." ³¹ The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. ³² Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?" ³³ The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God."

This miracle impacts at least 5000 people at the same time. Remember there were women and children present, but the account only mentions the men. I want us to see the miracles of Christ in their proper light. They are not done to impress and they are not done to gain influence or power over people.

In face...Jesus never asked for or received anything from the crowds. He was the giver, from beginning to end. He summed up His purpose this way....

Matthew 20:28 ²⁸ Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

John explains further when he tells us.....

John 1:18 ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

Men do not know who God is until they see Him clearly in Jesus. Jesus also confirmed this purpose for His coming:

John 14:8-11 ⁸ Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." ⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

This morning we want to see God more clearly through this miracle. It is compassionate, not just spectacular. All Christ's miracles are aimed at needy humans, who even though they are mostly self centered and seeking are loved by God. Like little children or sheep without a shepherd. The scripture records Christ's heart toward you....

Matthew 9:35-36 ³⁵ And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

The Scene

John 6:1-4 After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. ² And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. ³ Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.

After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee: Jesus had been teaching, preaching, healing and offering testimony to His deity and Messiahship. He was doing so in Jerusalem and the surrounding regions. He now leave and returns to His home region.

And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick: Jesus had attracted a lot of attention because He healed virtually everyone who came to Him and this is a basic need of humanity. We are sick all the time.

Matthew 8:14-17 ¹⁴ And when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. ¹⁵ He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him. ¹⁶ That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and **healed all** who were sick. ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."

Nothing like this had ever happened before and never has since. Jesus was never hampered by lack of faith or sin. He healed demon possessed people who where raving with hostility and hatred and would never have asked for healing. He healed children from a distance who were unaware of His power. The crowds were impressed, as well they should have been. This is why they were following Him.

Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples: Jesus assumes the teaching position. If you give a preacher a crowd he will probably preach. Jesus had done this over and over again throughout His ministry.

Matthew 5:1-2 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

Luke 5:3 ³ Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the people from the boat.

Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand: This puts the time of year in the Spring of the year. It also helps explain the crowds. Almost all the men left their work and fields to go to the Passover feast. This might be why they were able to follow him around...they did not have to go to work this week! They were preparing to go up to the Passover.

The Circumstance:

John 6:5-9 ⁵ Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹ "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?"

Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?": As I said Jesus normally preached to the crowds when He sat down on a hill side, but today is different. He has in mind to do one of His works that will testify to His deity and Messiahship. They are out in the country side near the Sea of Galilee. There are only small villages and farms and probably not many of those. So...Jesus.....

He looks out over this huge crowd that is coming straight toward where He has sat down and he says to Philip...."Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?": Ladies, have you ever had unexpected guests for dinner? 2 or 3 or 4? What would you do with 5,000? And suppose you were a single man and you were out in the country side far from any town with a bakery....and even if there was a bakery could you imagine going to it and asking for 5,000 rolls. A lack of bread does not seem like a big deal until you consider how much bread is lacking.

He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do: Jesus knows what He is doing here. He is asking the impossible of Philip and Philip knows it. The purpose here is to get them to know it. To know that bread and even life itself is given and sustained by God. Next week we will see how Jesus had to teach this lesson again.

Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.": Finding a few dollars when we are broke can just be considered "good luck." But this is an impossible situation. There is no way to provide this humanly. This provision requires extraordinary divine power over the ordinary forces of the world. AND we are speaking of plain old bread! This is the point Christ wants to drive home to them! This account provides insight into what God is doing in your life and mine when difficulties and needs strike.

**He is not testing us to see what we will do!!!
He is testing us so that we will see what He will do.**

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?": This is an accurate evaluation. This is how we feel about our circumstances all the time. Well I need this much strength, but I only have a little. I need thousands of dollars but I only have hundreds. I need joy and peace back into my life, but I do not have the capacity to make that happen. These are the circumstances of human lives. Sooner or later the most self-sufficient person comes up against something he or she simply cannot understand, fix or resolve.

It is Christ's intention from this grassy hillside to make this point: Men are dependent on God for their lives, breath and yes...even their bread. He even taught us to pray.....

Matthew 6:11 ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,

He told you to pray for bread, but we think it comes from the store. This event is designed to convince you otherwise.

The Miracle:

John 6:10-13 ¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." ¹³ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten.

Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number: It is a nice day...it is spring...the people have been walking for a great distance trying to follow Jesus to the next stopping place. They wanted to see the healings. They might have wanted to hear the teaching. Even the officers of the Sanhedrin who were sent to arrest Christ came back empty handed and explained by saying.....

John 7:46-47 ⁴⁶ "No one **ever spoke** like this man!" ⁴⁷ The Pharisees answered them, "Have you also been deceived?"

Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted: Christ is generous with people because His power as God is unlimited. He does not need to pass around the fish and bread and say...."just take one little piece because we might run out." He makes as much as He needs and He still wields His Creator / God Sovereignty over the universe today. You can ask Christ for the impossible. You can pray with expectation of His answers.

And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.": No rush...it is "all you can eat!" Only when they were done did Jesus send them into the crowd to gather up what was left. This tells us that they ate and ate and ate some more. They were not rationed and when they were finally full they willingly let the disciples pick up everything that was left uneaten.

So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten: Enough for each of them to have a full basket...but more importantly to realize what had been done. They started with enough for a couple of people...fed over 5,000 people and now they still have enough for each disciple to have a full basket of food. They participated in this and observed it but did not learn from it. How do I know? Mark records the following observation....

Mark 6:51-52 ⁵¹ And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, ⁵² for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

The Response:

John 6:14-15 ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" ¹⁵ Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!": This is not the conclusion Christ wanted them to reach...but they were headed for the Passover. It was full blown patriotism and Zionism that drove them now. "Anybody who can do such things is the long awaited Messiah and He will give us everything. Didn't Isaiah tell us the Messiah would crush our enemies and rule the world from David's throne?"

Isaiah 9:6-7 ⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his **shoulder**, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself: He will deliver us from Rome, poverty and disease. And...all of that is true...only not today. Not now! Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. When given a chance to read some of Isaiah's prophecy and apply it to Himself Jesus read this passage:

Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the **brokenhearted**, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; ² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,

CONCLUSION: It is just bread right? How hard can it be to get some bread? Well that depends doesn't it. What about your lunch today? How hard will it be to get some lunch? For us...at this moment in time...not hard at all...BECAUSE God has provided the means for us to have it. What a shame that our prayers before meals are not usually very sincere in this regard. You should try to change that starting today.

What response does Christ want from you this morning? Is this story so familiar that, like the disciples who were there it just slips through our mind with no impact at all?

We face a withering barrage of inadequacy. We are not smart enough, strong enough, rich enough, clever enough to beat back the onslaught of life's circumstances. Sooner or later they do defeat us and we die. Before that happens however, life can become a bitter pill. The lesson of the loaves and fishes is profoundly simple. God can make what you have and who you are enough. This does not mean that we are to stop working and striving to do things and become something, but it does mean that what you have now is enough for now and when you need more....God can and will give you more.

God will take what you have. If you have a little faith then use that to trust Him a little. If you have limited resources then give God some limited gifts. Do not withhold the few loaves saying "**but what are they for so many?**" Purpose to give yourself to God for His purposes.

I once when I was young I told a Pastor that I felt inadequate for the task at hand. He replied by saying, "well good...you certainly are. Now we will see what God will do." So... let Christ have your life and possessions. He promises that it is an agreeable and fulfilling proposition. When you do you will be worshiping God and you will be finding out from experience that God is the adequate giver of all things. Paul described it this way:

Romans 12:1-3 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. ³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.