

April 17, 2016
Luke 6:38
Mark 6:30-44
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“Bread of Life”

Good morning! This morning, as I trust you gathered from our scripture text, we’re going to be considering a biblical story commonly called “The Feeding of the 5,000.” This is one of the stories about Jesus which appears in all four of the gospels. I’m going to summarize those for you rather than reading each account. There are variations in each gospel, but my purpose today is for us to consider what they all have in common, rather than how they’re different.

In Mark 6, which you just heard, the disciples go around and see what food they can gather, come up with 5 loaves and two fish, and those who ate were five thousand people.

In John 6, the disciples find *a boy* with five loaves and two fish, and it feeds about five thousand people.

In Luke 9, *the disciples* have no more than 5 loaves and 2 fish, and it feeds 5K men.

In Matthew 14, *the disciples* have nothing except five loaves and two fish, and it feeds 5K men, plus women and children.

Don’t even get me started on Luke and Matthew’s head count for the meal; I think we all know that men aren’t the only ones who eat. Just ask our Fellowship Team who prepared breakfast and served lunch for three men at our retreat yesterday. The point is, there were a lot of people; they were in a deserted place; evening was coming on; and people have to eat.

Let's hear from a character who appears in none of these biblical accounts. He's portrayed by Ted Schwartz on this video sketch from Ted & Company.

DVD Track 8 Feeding the 5,000 from What's so Funny About Money?

Jesus has a way of challenging our expectations, right? It's no wonder this story is in every gospel, because it's big news: anyone who can feed thousands of people with five loaves and two fish, ought to get our attention. What I'm interested in is how this miraculous meal gets started. I believe it begins before the loaves and fish appear. Loaves and fish are the stuff which gets shared, but the sharing started back when someone -- people in the crowd, the disciples, a little boy -- decided to let go of their stuff and let Jesus have it. Jesus doesn't do a magic trick; he performs a miracle. A magic trick would be conjuring up baskets of bread from thin air. A miracle is a generous heart which makes a small offering which Jesus blesses and multiplies for the good of at least 5,000 people. I'll let you decide which is more amazing. But this miracle begins at very least with generosity. It could have been faith, but the gospels don't tell us that the disciples or this boy expected Jesus to do something we'd still be talking about 2,000 years later; all we know for sure is that they were willing to share their supper.

Could Jesus have fed all those people if no one had come forward with food? He's Jesus, right? I guess he could have if the point of this miracle was to be sure that no one went home hungry that evening. People have to eat. But what if there's more to this story; a greater purpose than simply meeting our physical needs? What if the thing which Jesus *can't* do -- or *won't* do -- is to force us to be generous? Because forced generosity isn't generosity at all. It might be guilt, or duty, or fear, but if you resent sharing, and you resent me for asking how you feel about sharing, it isn't generosity.

I believe that as Christians, we should be known by what we hold on to: our faith in God, our hope in Jesus Christ, the Word of God, the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. These are things we can hold on to when things are at their worst and God demands our best. This is the strength and comfort which God has promised never to take from us. But it is equally important that as followers of Jesus, we are known by what we let go of. Sure, there's bad stuff we need to

let go: sin, pride, self-righteousness, hatred, resentment -- yesterday Debra gave us steps for forgiveness and how to let go of some of these things. We *have* to let go of the bad things in our lives if we want to have healthy relationships with other people and with Jesus. But how about the good things we have that we need to hold less tightly? Our praise, blessing, and joy? Unquestionably we owe these things to God, but would it be so bad if we shared them with one another, too? Or should I be careful about telling Lodema what a good job she did leading worship this morning, because what if she starts to expect that every time?

Praise, blessing and joy aren't even commodities -- they cost me nothing. How about *stuff*, actual *stuff*? That's what this gospel story is about. People have to eat. Five loaves and two fish might not seem like that much to let go of, but if it's all you have to eat, you'd probably think twice before handing it over. Remember, Jesus didn't tell the disciples ahead of time what he was going to do with the loaves and fishes, he just sent them to see what was out there. If no one had been willing to share, would Jesus have had anything to bless?

We in the church have to be careful when we talk about generosity, because we have a well-earned reputation for hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is what happens when we pray that hungry people would be fed, and we hold on tight to our bread. Hey, I worked hard for that bread. Even if I did share my bread, there would still be a lot of hungry people; I can't be responsible for everybody. When I was a seminary I learned a table grace from Guatemala. It's pretty radical theology wrapped up in a simple tune. It goes like this:

Thank you God, for the bread. Give bread to those who have
hunger,
And hunger for justice to those who have bread. Thank you
God, for the bread.

You see, brothers and sisters, we have bread and people have to eat. Sometimes we literally have bread -- and chicken salad and berry crisp --all of these were left over after the Women's Retreat, and they were all given away to Faith Mission. But we also have spiritual bread that people are hungry for, and we shouldn't be letting that go to waste, either. What would the church look like if we felt the same

urgency about sharing Jesus Christ as we do about sharing our physical bread? The gospel of John makes the most direct connection between literal and spiritual bread: in John 6 -- the same chapter where we get the story of the Feeding of the 5,000 (Men) -- Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." In other words, people have to eat. Jesus Christ is the bread that we need and it is the bread that the world is hungry for. We don't have to have artisan bread and floun in catch-of-the-day fish; and we don't have to take it personally if people don't accept it with enthusiasm; we just have to share what we have with open hands and a generous heart, with the faith that even if our morsel seems pretty insignificant, Jesus can take it and bless it and use it. May God give us generous hands and hearts, because people have to eat. Amen.