

**John 6:1-15**  
**Abundant Bread**  
March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Today we are looking at the miracle of the feeding of the 5000. All four of the gospels contain this story.

Jesus and his disciples got into a boat and crossed the Sea of Galilee and on land a large crowd followed them. Across the water it was only about a 4 mile sail. On land it was a 9 mile hike to where they wound up in the region of Bethsaida.

Where Jesus stopped and addressed the crowd was from a hill that had a large grassy area on which the people eventually sat. It again could be described as a “deserted place” or wilderness.



Verse 4 lets us know it was near the Passover time, which meant there were many Jews on pilgrimage to Jerusalem that would have joined those walking on the shore to see Jesus.

In those days, because of the Jewish dietary laws, the Kosher Laws, the Jews on pilgrimage would have been carrying their food with them in baskets like the baskets that were mentioned later on within which the leftovers were collected. Jews were known and identified in Jesus’ day by these baskets that they carried.

And those that followed Jesus on the shore line probably took food with them. Again they would have had their baskets for that purpose. If any had any inkling they would have been walking 9 miles they would have brought food with them for those of you who hike know that 9 miles is half a day’s walk.

Well Jesus’ actions taken as a whole were a sign to the people of who he was. He was the new Moses for the New Israel that had again gathered in the wilderness.

And like Moses who prayed to God to provide bread in the wilderness and got Manna, this time, Jesus himself provided the bread. He blessed the bread or “gave thanks over it” and it was provided.



In that Jesus provided the bread it was a sign that he was more than a New Moses, He was God for he was the source of the bread.

Now traditionally there have been three interpretations of the miracle that Jesus did that day. I want to explore, briefly, two of them and concentrate on the third.

**The first interpretation of the miracle is that Jesus Christ multiplied the loaves and fish.** It was simple that-- a miracle of multiplication.

The 5 loaves and 2 fish were a poor offering to Jesus. Barley bread was the bread of the poor. It was even socially despised. And the fish, they were the size of sardines. The Sea of Galilee was full of these sardine sized fish that were caught and pickled and then used as a spread on the barley bread.

A small and meager gift, but it was enough to feed 5000 + people. Now the problem some have with this being a miracle of multiplication is that in Jesus' temptation he refused to turn stones into bread and here he is multiplying loaves and fish.

Jesus in refusing to turn stones into bread was resisting the temptation to be the welfare King. And here you can see why. In verse 15 it says the crowd was going to take him by force and make him King.

Jesus read their hearts correctly for later in verse 6:26, that we did not read today, he says, *“I tell you the truth; you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.”*

Now the **second interpretation of this sign is that it was a sacramental meal.** ‘Each person got a little bit and it was enough to richly nourish their hearts and minds.’ *Barclay*

This is what happens when we share in Holy Communion. In the Gospel of John there isn't a last supper mentioned. There is foot washing; so some think that here is the sacramental meal of Jesus to which all are invited: disciples, believers, the curious, and those just passing by.

This is similar to what we do as United Methodists in that our Communion Table is an open table to all who would come.

Now the **third interpretation** is that the real miracle that Jesus did that day was **to change the hearts and minds: the very human nature of those who were before him that day.** This fits in very well with Jesus' call to be born again. When we are born again our **“hearts and lives” are changed by Christ.**

Now I personally believe that there was a miracle of the multiplication of loaves and fishes, but what if part of the miracle happened this way?

That Jesus changed the hearts and minds of his hearers from selfish self-interest to sharing of their resources with others. To change our human nature in that way is often in this world a greater miracle.

Some had brought food with them as much as many had not, because when they set out they did not know how far Jesus would sail. And the pilgrims to the Passover in Jerusalem would have had their baskets of food with them and maybe the biggest and best miracle that day was that Jesus and the boy's offering inspired them to overcome their natural self-centeredness and they shared.

As babies we are born into this world as selfish self-centered creatures. The dark side of human nature is selfishness and we are just born that way. We are a mixture of light and darkness, but one of the most prominent features of being human is our selfishness.

A story is told of *“A mom driving her five year old son to McDonald’s one day and they passed a car accident. Whenever the Mom saw something terrible like that, she would always say a prayer for those who might be hurt, so she pointed and said to her son, “We should pray.” From the back seat she heard his earnest prayer: “Please, God, don’t let those cars block the entrance to McDonald’s.”*

Mickey’s Funnies

Growth in our life as Christians comes as we overcome our selfish human nature. It is a miracle when it comes in individual lives as well as in the lives of communities and nations. It is a miracle of God when we begin to look out for others as much as we look out for ourselves, and if that is what happened that day in the sharing of bread and fish than it was a miracle made by God. **It was a change of hearts and lives.**

It is when we begin living, truly living out of the giving side of our human nature, rather than the taking and hoarding side do we reach maturity as human beings and as Christians.

Maybe that was the greater miracle that day! Jesus’ preaching and the meager gift of an unnamed boy overcame people’s natural self-centeredness and they shared with one another what they had with them.

Two attitudes towards want and need were shown that day. **Philip when asked by Jesus, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” Philip despaired.**

**He answered him, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.”**

His reply might be summarized as **“There’s not enough!”** In his mind he thought it was hopeless. We hear that attitude whenever we repeat it, and say **there is not enough time, money, talent, or interest.**

We repeat that hopelessness whenever we say we cannot change for “we’ve always done it that way.” We can fall into that trap when we think Miracle Sunday is today and we won’t raise that much in one day!

We already had over 8k given and another 10k committed by the UM Men. They believe in you as a church and what you are doing here.

Do you believe in the power of Christ, that if you give the best gift that you can, that God will multiply it even if you think it is meager?

Now the Miracle Sunday offering has been taken, and we are now just looking toward the total, so let's look to the future.

**Andrew was hopeful.** He had faith in Jesus. He brought just a boy with just a little food to Jesus: 5 barley loaves and 2 sardines. You can almost hear him saying. **It is a little, but is it enough!?** And Jesus said through his actions it certainly was enough!!!

Andrew brought a boy who would literally not have even counted that day. When they said about 5000 were there they only counted the men. Women and children didn't count, but to Jesus they did.

We need to bring our children to God. We need to speak to them of God at home and bring them to church to meet God in worship and Sunday School, VBS, service and giving. I celebrate you parents and grandparents who have brought and bring your children and youth to worship and church activities.

Whatever we bring to Jesus counts. *“Jesus needs what we can bring him. It may not be much but he needs it. We need to lay ourselves on the altar of service. We may not have much to bring and feel sorry and embarrassed we can't bring more....but that is not reason for failing to bring what we have. **Little is much in the hands of God.**”*

Barclay p. ???

Thank God Andrew and this boy did not think they had too little to offer. Thank God for the unnamed mother of this boy. This boy brought his lunch to Jesus, but I bet it was his mother who packed it for him! An unnamed Mom who probably never thought much about making her son a lunch for the day; but her small service was invaluable to Jesus and 5000 others that day.

I think of, and want to say thanks to those who work in the background, literally, in the kitchen at church events and dinners. Those who have made the delicious bread we have smelled and tasted at our Lenten services. Your offering of time and talent blesses so many others, and God bless the persons who wash the pots and pans!

Give what you can to others and the church in terms of time service, gifts and prayers and **God will do the rest!**

*“The questions which Christ will ask of us at the Judgment Seat will have nothing to do directly with prayer, doctrine and spiritual things at all, but only with the helpfulness and the unselfishness that ought to flow from them.”* Interpreters Bible Luke/John

Think the parable of the “Separation of the Sheep from the Goats”. Our faith, our loyalty to God is shown in our works. As James says, ***“Faith without works is dead.”***

Does our faith lead us to sharing of our time, and resources? If not what good is it? The real miracle that Jesus needs to do in our lives is not to provide bread for us, but to change our hearts and minds; so that we share the bread we have. We share the gifts and talents we do have. Actually, the most generous people in the world are the poor.

Every day this church demonstrates you are never too old to listen to God’s call to serve and to share, and you also are never too young. Our Confirmation class raised enough money with your help to put a floor in a classroom in a School in Mexico.

Our Cyfm Committee is taking a new larger approach to VBS this summer and in fact is adding a once a week VBS called Terrific Tuesdays. Guess what day of the week that will be. New things for a new future.

Here’s a story of a young teenage woman who listened to God and followed what God instructed her to do. I always ask, “What is God saying and what are you going to do?” Here is the story of a young woman who asked and answered that question.

### **ROLL CLIP “A PASSION FOR CHILDREN AND WIDOWS” 2:24**

This teenager opened her heart and mind to God. She listened to God. She gave what she had in terms of time and money and service.

Oh that we would open our hearts and minds to what God would have to say to us.

Oh that we would follow it.

Oh that we would bring all that we have to God.

We would go from **the despair of Philip that “there is not enough”** to **the hope of Andrew “it’s a little, but in your hands Jesus it’s enough!”**

I invite you to open your hearts and minds to listen to God.

I challenge you to live out what God says to you in your life.

Bring what you have to God whether it is a little or a whole lot and see the miracle that God will do with it.

In a little while we will hear back from the counters about the total for the Miracle Sunday offering. We will hear whether it is a little or a lot. I suspect it will be a lot.

This story ends with the disciples picking up 12 baskets of leftovers. I suspect it will be the same sort of miracle today.

In fact the Church Council passed a motion that anything over and above what is needed for the parking lot and the cameras be applied to our next building campaign. In that building program we will be again tested in bringing our best to God.

But always remember **if it is given to God,**

**if it is a little or a lot,**

**if it is our best**

**than it is enough.**

In Jesus’ Name. Amen!