

"JESUS' FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND."

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden

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Texts for the Sermon: Mark 6:30-44

Introduction.

What a great and so familiar story. It must be great and important to God because it's the only miracle before the resurrection that's repeated in all four of the Gospels. It demands more than just ordinary attention. Jesus wants to speak to you and feed your soul through this text, I urge you to listen and to believe and to respond.

Jesus, have compassion on me and enable me to preach though my ability is small, and have compassion on all of us and feed us spiritually the bread of life that we need. Teach us and change us for your glory and our benefit. Come, Bread of Heaven, feed us until we are full and want no more. Amen.

Mark 6:31-44.

Jesus' Incredible Compassion (vs. 34 "He saw the crowds and had compassion on them").

Jesus had sought out this deserted place to give His disciples a much needed rest after their mission. This is the *first* sign of compassion. Jesus cares for His own and He recognizes our human frailty and our need for rest. Work and rest, both are good and both are from God.

Second, we see Jesus' compassion in that while He was seeking solitude from the crowds, when they pursue He doesn't evade them further or send them away. He sees their souls and how hungry they are, they are like sheep without a shepherd. He sees that they have left their homes and their occupations to pursue Jesus this far. Though He and His disciples are tired and worn out, exhausted from ministry and service, Jesus doesn't spare Himself. He sets aside His own needs for the sake of others.

The disciples not so much. They feel compelled to tell Jesus that He should send them home while there's still time to go buy food and eat. They think they are being the compassionate ones.

Note the irony, they told Jesus where they were, what time it was, and what he should do. Be careful of the kind of thinking that says we need to bring Jesus up to date and bring Him in touch with reality.

They still have no faith for a miracle, even after all they had seen and heard and done? Did they not just return from a mission where Christ empowered them to cast out demons and heal the sick?

Never forget our Lord never changes, He is always compassionate and He looks down on His children now from heaven and His heart is moved.

Do we feel His compassion for all the scattered sheep without a shepherd, wandering, lost, hungry, starving for some truth, for some spiritual food, for some life giving bread? The person who cares nothing for the souls of others is nothing like Jesus. The person who is focused only on material or physical needs is nothing like Jesus.

The disciples wanted to solve the problem by making it go away, but Jesus wouldn't let them get away with that or get off so easy.

Jesus' Impossible Commands (vs. 37 "You give them something to eat").

Are you kidding me? Do you know what kind of grocery bill that is? At least a thousand loaves of bread and two thousand small fish? Their best guess is 200 denarii, that's two hundred days wages, we're approaching a year's salary here (at least ten month's worth).

This reminds me of Moses' complaint in another wilderness long ago.

Numbers 11:13 Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me and say, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.'

Numbers 11:21 But Moses said, "The people among whom I am number six hundred thousand on foot, and you have said, 'I will give them meat, that they may eat a whole month!' 22 Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, and be enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, and be enough for them?"

Why does Jesus tell them to do that? Why does Jesus ask them to do something He knows full well they can't do, something they don't have the ability or resources to do? Why?

Where have they just been? What have they just been doing? Have they not just returned from a very successful preaching and teaching mission?

Who sent them out? And in whose name and in whose power did they preach and heal and cast out demons? Jesus'. Jesus commanded, "You give them something to eat." And they basically answer, "How in the world are we supposed to do that?" They forget who it is that sent them and who it is that worked through them.

Why does Jesus command them to do the impossible? Or a better question, why does He keep doing that, why does He still do that today, to you and me?

Do unto others as you would want them to do to you.

Love you enemies. Bless those who persecute you.

Forgive without limit, seven times seventy.

Do not return evil for evil, do not take revenge.

Do not lust after another women.

Do not divorce your wife or husband.

Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Do not be anxious about anything in your life.

Put to death the sin that is in you.

Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself.

As one writer put it, Jesus always calls us to the level of our inadequacy (Michael Card, *Mark: The Gospel of Passion*, p. 6). Or to quote an old pastor, in Jesus' view, "duty is not measured by

ability” (Horace Busnell). Duty doesn’t depend on ability. Duty depends on obedience in total reliance on Jesus. His impossible demands force us to turn back to Him and to lean on Him in total dependence.

Jesus’ aim is always faith. He confronts unbelief all the time (oh you of little faith) and calls us to faith in Him.

Jesus makes our inadequacies very plain and obvious. He has to otherwise we will steal as much credit and glory as we can. So He made them quantify just exactly what they could do. “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” Five loaves and two fish. Talk about pitiful, painfully pitiful, pathetically pitiful. Jesus makes us to the math.

How can five feed five thousand? How can my limited, meager resources or strength or ability or intelligent satisfy some huge need? Human math is always lacking, divine math never is.

Bring what you have, give it to Jesus, ask Him to bless and multiply it, and in obedience go and begin doing what He has told you to do. God will bless and multiply what we give to Him in faith and obedience. Jesus is constantly calling us to faith.

Companies of hundreds and fifties.

Then Jesus says OK, good, now that we got that clear, get everyone to sit down arranged in groups. I wonder if the disciples crumbled to themselves as they got this huge crowd organized to eat. “What’s the point of this, He’s just setting them all up for the expectation that they are going to eat, but the food we have won’t even feed the first group.”

Why arrange them in groups?

It may be a reflection of Jesus’ compassion, to bring order out of chaos so none are overlooked.

Calvin suggests several reasons. That the miracle might be more obvious when it is seen that there is so great a crowd, a way of getting a count. That they might all be better able to witness the miracle. To show Christ was preparing for a great feast even without having any food. To test the obedience of the disciples by telling them to do something so ridiculous (go wash in a dirty river seven times, II Kings 5:10-11).

The test of obedience is always important. Obedience always comes before blessing, faith before sight. They were simply to obey Christ’s commands and leave the rest to Him.

We often don’t have a clue how Christ will answer a prayer or provide for a need. We are called to trust and obey and step out in faith and watch and see what He will do.

That applies to sharing our faith with another, submitting to an authority, giving Him our anxious thoughts, bringing a tenth of our income into the Lord’s house, or loving a hard to love neighbor. We step out in faith, we trust and He will take what we give and take care of the rest.

Jesus’ Unlimited Power (vss. 39-41 and then he commanded...took...blessed...gave).

The miracle begins with a prayer of thanksgiving. By His own example Jesus teaches us to give thanks, to express gratitude to God for His provision. All we have and are comes from Him.

When we don't give thanks we stain the gift with unbelief. To be unbelieving is to make it unholy. Don't profane God's gifts. Don't take something from His hand without acknowledging Him and thanking Him.

Christ is teaching us how to receive all gifts. This is why we say grace, or acknowledge the grace. Begin every meal with a prayer of thanks. End every day with a prayer of gratitude for all the symbols and evidences of His Fatherly love and compassion and His infinite goodness.

Ephesians 5:20 give thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Consider the unlimited power of Jesus.

We are told that there 5000 men. That's a Roman legion. Talk about feeding an army. And it seems reasonable to double that number with women and children. We are told the people had no food. We are told that all there was was five loaves of cheap barley bread and two small fish. That wouldn't feed this congregation let alone 10,000. We are told that it would take 200 days wages to buy enough food.

Yet we are told that Jesus took the bread and fish, blessed them, broke them and gave them to be distributed and when they were full there were twelve baskets of bread left.

People are able to come up with all kinds of explanations for all kinds of miracles, but how do you explain this? How do you explain something out of nothing, more out of less? How do you explain ten thousand full stomachs? You can't fool or trick that many people. This was the most public of all Jesus' miracles, more eye witnesses than any other, maybe all of them put together.

The one who made the world out of nothing is in their very midst, God Himself. The one who sent manna down from heaven and was with Moses and the people in the wilderness is in their midst. To create out of nothing is a power belonging only to God.

Some say this was the greatest of Christ's miracles, to create something out of nothing, to bring into existence something that had not existed before. And in front of so many witnesses. They are all left without excuse, having witnessed the power of God in their midst.

Have you ever seen a miracle like this? Have you ever seen a huge crowd feed from very little? If we haven't it's because our eyes and hearts are dull and we have become so accustomed to God's generous provision that we don't even see it any more. God does this miracle every day just a bit slowed down so we miss it.

Every year the Creator God takes a bunch of little seeds of grain and adds some soil, sun and water and transforms it into enough food to feed over seven billion people. He turns water into wine every day, through rain and vines and grapes and time.

Every year's harvest has enough food to feed the world and enough seed leftover to plant next year's crop. And none of it happens without God's provision, blessing and increase.

When He feeds 5000 we call it a miracle, when He feeds seven billion we call it normal.

Do we see the work of God all around us? Do we feel the power of His love and compassion and provision in every loaf of bread, in every glass of wine, in every meal our wives and mothers prepare? Do we bow in humble gratitude and grateful praise to the Father above?

And what about the starving millions, you ask? God sends the food and God sends people to distribute the food. It's sin that disconnects the source and the need. Sinful men rob, steal, plunder, horde, extort, and otherwise deny others access to the food available. It's lack of compassion, not lack of resources. Where there's compassion there's provision.

Application and conclusion.

There are three ways to respond to an impossible situation with inadequate resources.

1.) Despair, hopelessness, give up; 2.) Frantic effort to try and solve it yourself; 3.) Seek the Lord, trust Him and humbly offer yourself to His service. The disciples chose number one. Jesus chose number three.

If we are needy and humbly acknowledge that, He will have compassion and supply our every need from His power, by His grace and for His glory. He will take whatever we offer to Him and He will multiply it. And when He does, we must be certain and quick to say thanks and not just for the gift, but for the giver.

The focus is not the bread, it's on Jesus. Jesus came into the world not to give bread that satisfies for a day, but to be the bread that satisfies for a lifetime. Taste and see that the Lord, He is good.

Jesus tells them to feed the people and then He gives them what they need to do what He tells them. Remember to wait, to wait upon the Lord. Ask and you will receive.

Many of you hold back from serving or giving or doing some ministry or using a spiritual gift because you think it's too small or you are inadequate or you will fail. If you try to feed 5000 with five loaves you will fail. But if you give your small gift to Jesus and ask Him to bless it and you step out, what miracle will He do that then you can give Him thanks for.

Christ is Lord of the impossible. Pray for impossible things, do impossible things in faith. Believe in Him who can do all things and even make things from nothing.

The Lord we wait upon and follow has compassion, He cares for us and He has all sufficient provision, He gives us all we need and more, He is generous.

With Jesus you can never give so much that you have nothing left over.

With Jesus your little is much, He multiplies it. But beware before He multiplies He breaks. Before abundance comes affliction. We have to die to live, we have to go down to come up. We have to give to receive.

Prayer: Jewish Table blessing: "Praise be to you, O Lord our God, king of the world, who makes bread to come forth from the earth, and who provides for all that you have created."