

A FILET OF FISH MEAL – SUPER-SIZED
John 6:1-13

INTRODUCTION:

I do not always begin my sermons by reading the text. I often start with a story, an illustration or even a joke. But today, I want to begin by reading the text for the message. And there is a reason. Please pay particular attention to the text and think about the words that John wrote when he recorded the details of a miracle that Jesus performed. This passage appears on page 1055 of the pew Bible in the rack in front of you. It is also in column 4 of the insert in your bulletin.

6¹ Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias),² and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick.³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples.⁴ The Jewish Passover Feast was near.

5 When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?”⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

7 Philip answered him, “Eight months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”

8 Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up,⁹ “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

10 Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them.¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

12 When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.”¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

Are there any questions that came to your mind when we read this text? Maybe several questions? For instance:

- How did he do that? That has got to be the number one question on the minds of most people when they read this text: How did he do that?
- Why was one boy the only one who brought a lunch with him? Out of 5,000 men (plus women and children), why was this boy the only one with something to eat?

- Why did John record that only the men sat down? John wrote: "*There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them.*" Didn't the women and children get to sit down on the grass to eat?
- Where did they get the baskets? The disciples filled 12 baskets with the broken pieces of the barley loaves that were left over.
- Wasn't there any left over fish? Again, John records that there were 12 baskets full of leftover pieces *of the barley loaves*. No fish scraps?
- What did they do with the leftovers? Jesus said, "*Let nothing be wasted*" so we can be sure they didn't gather the pieces and take 12 basketfuls to the dumpster. But what did they do with them?

I don't have the answers to any of these questions. I can only speculate because the Bible doesn't provide us any of this information. But the Bible does give us a lot of detail about this miracle...enough detail that we can learn some important truths from this incident. Some of the details are to be found in the different accounts of this miracle as recorded in each of the four Gospels. That is why I have copied those accounts and printed them as an insert in your bulletin this morning.

From these four perspectives on the feeding of the 5,000, we know several things. For instance, we know that there were more than 5,000 who were fed because Matthew tells us there were 5,000 men plus women and children. Maybe Jesus fed 10,000 on five loaves and two fish. Maybe 15,000. Who knows? I guess once you get to the point of feeding a multitude on so little, the exact number doesn't make a whole lot of difference.

From John's Gospel, we know that Jesus was teaching on a mountainside when he fed the people. John also tells us that Jesus got the fish and bread from a boy in the crowd. The other Gospels don't record that detail. John also tells us that there was plenty of grass for the 5,000 men to sit down...and they did.

Mark and Luke record that Jesus told the disciples to organize the multitude (5,000; 10,000; 15,000 or more people) into smaller groups before they were served their lunch.

John relates that, after the people ate, Jesus did not want anything to go to waste so he directed that the scraps should be gathered. And all four Gospels specify that twelve basketsful were gathered. But, again, nobody tells us what anybody did with the leftovers.

One thing I can discern from these four accounts: the disciples of Jesus have not changed much over the years. Then, as now, there is a tendency to focus on the wrong things when we face really big challenges.

Many of us focus on the obstacles and not the opportunities. We focus on the problems and not the possibilities. The twelve apostles thought the problem was:

- I. **The Place: it was too remote** – There was no market close by to purchase food for the hungry crowd.
- II. **The People: there were too many** – There were thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of hungry people and the disciples couldn't handle a multitude of that size.
- III. **The Provisions: there weren't enough** – They did not have enough food to feed them and not enough money to buy a sufficient amount.

All too often, today's disciples of Jesus react in the same way to the challenges, the obstacles and the problems we face. We make excuses for not being a growing church because Clay City isn't Houston or Atlanta or Chicago or even Effingham. We tell the Lord that our church would be growing if only we were in a place with a larger population base. But there are plenty of lost people in Clay City, in Bunnyville, in Sailor Springs, in Rinard, Louisville, Flora and rural Clay County. If we won't tell these people about Jesus, what makes us think we'd tell someone if we lived where there were more?

At the other extreme, we can get overwhelmed by all the unsaved people we know and we get frozen into inactivity. There are so many people who don't have a relationship with the Lord that we don't know where to start so we don't. We tell ourselves that there are too many people to reach and we wouldn't know what to do with them if they all started coming to church so we do nothing.

We also make excuses that we don't have the resources to get the job done. If we had the money that some churches have, we could do more. If we had their preacher or their building or their volunteers, we could win the world. But we don't. All we've got is what we've got and that's not enough to do much. That's the way we sometimes think and act. But let me make sure you hear this: we have every resource we need to do everything God has called us to do. What we really lack is faith.

CONCLUSION:

The twelve learned an important lesson on the side of the mountain that day. They learned to leave their doubts, their fears and their skeptical selves behind and move forward with the Lord.

But they could not learn any of this while they were concentrating on their limitations; they could only learn it when they concentrated on the Lord and watched what he did. When they did that, they learned that Jesus

can take what you have, multiply it and use it to meet needs. Have we learned that lesson?

Instead of obsessing about the problems, let's focus on the plan.

When Jesus responded to the need, he taught his disciples (then and now) that the solution to the problems was:

1. Give the Lord what you have – If five loaves and two fish is all you have, surrender it to the Lord.
2. Give it all to him – The boy did not keep any back for himself, he gave all he had to the Lord and the Lord used all he had.
3. Get organized – Jesus told the twelve to organize the people into manageable groups. That is administration and organization. We can't accomplish much until we get organized for action.
4. Give thanks and pray – Each of the four Gospel accounts record that Jesus prayed and gave thanks for what he had to work with.
5. Share the work – While Jesus could have handled the feeding of the multitude by himself, he did not. He involved the twelve. And he involved a young lad. The work of ministry is to be shared among the church.
6. Be a good steward of what God provides – Again, each of the four records of this miracle specify that Jesus had the leftovers gathered up, so that, as John wrote, "...*nothing be wasted.*" Disciples of Jesus are not to be wasteful and that particularly includes in the work of the church.

That day, people who had listened to Jesus' teaching were hungry for bread to eat. Today, many have never heard teaching about Jesus and they are hungry for bread...the Bread of Life. Then, as now, the solution begins when we look to the Lord, learn from him and lean on him. If we take our focus off of our limitations and put our focus on the Lord, we will find that, right now, this very day, the Lord has brought us to a special moment when we can put our past behind us and move forward...with him.