

AFTER THANKSGIVING? (Matthew 14:1-23)

INTRODUCTION:

Well, another Thanksgiving has come and gone. I hope you got enough to eat and I hope you got to spend it with people you love. But what now? What comes after Thanksgiving?

My first thought was: leftovers! What comes after Thanksgiving? Turkey and noodles. Turkey casserole. Turkey divan. Turkey stir-fry. Turkey quiche. Turkey anything just to use up the leftovers.

And thinking of leftovers took me to the miracle of the feeding of the 5000. Did you realize that is the only miracle of Jesus that is recorded in all four gospels? Each of the gospels is a biography of Jesus written by a different author. As will happen, one writer decides to include certain incidents from the life of the person about whom he is writing and a different writer may include other incidents. Both biographies are true and accurate but they will not, typically, be identical...unless someone copied off of another person's paper.

In the telling of the story of the life of Christ, there is a record of many miracles that he performed. But the feeding of the 5000 is the only miracle that all four authors included in their biography of Jesus.

Would you please listen as I read from Matthew's account, found in Matthew 14, starting in verse 1? If you wish to follow along, you can find this passage on page 970 in the pew Bible in front of you.

14 ¹ At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, ² and he said to his attendants, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him."

³ Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, ⁴ for John had been saying to him: "It is not lawful for you to have her." ⁵ Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet.

⁶ On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for them and pleased Herod so much ⁷ that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. ⁸ Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." ⁹ The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted ¹⁰ and had John beheaded in the prison. ¹¹ His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother. ¹² John's

disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.

¹³ *When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns.* ¹⁴ *When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.*

¹⁵ *As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."*

¹⁶ *Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."*

¹⁷ *"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.*

¹⁸ *"Bring them here to me," he said.* ¹⁹ *And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people.* ²⁰ *They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.* ²¹ *The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.*

²² *Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd.* ²³ *After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone.*

- I. **After the DINNER comes the LEFTOVERS.** I don't know what the term "leftovers" means to you. To me, it means "scraps". After the meal is over, when everyone has eaten his fill, the leftovers are the scraps that go to the dog, to the garbage disposal or to Cool Whip containers to be stored in the fridge until they go to the dog or the garbage disposal at a later date.

When I asked my Sunday School class about "leftovers", I was surprised to learn that not everyone has the same reaction to "leftovers" that I have. For some of them, "leftovers" meant, "I don't have to cook tomorrow." Others thought that leftovers actually taste better than the food did the first time. And, for some, "leftovers" means "savings": that is, the food was paid for when it was first served and now it is like a free meal.

When I looked up the Greek word that the gospels writers used for "leftovers", I was in for a surprise. Far from "scraps", the Greek word for

“leftovers” actually means “the abundance.” The significance is that when Jesus fed the 5000, he provided more than enough for everyone to have something to eat; more than enough for everyone to eat their fill; he provided enough for everyone to eat all that they wanted, and then a surplus or an abundance beyond what the people could eat.

In John 10:10, when Jesus said that he came so that we might have life and have it more abundantly, he used the same word that was used for the leftovers after the 5000 were fed. That certainly does not mean that Jesus came so that we could have life and all of its scraps. It means that he came to give us abundance beyond our basic needs. Jesus came to give you a surplus of blessings in your life.

In Malachi 3:10, God told the prophet to tell the people that they should put Him to the test and bring their whole tithe into the storehouse of the Lord and see if He would not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out upon them a blessing that was more than they could contain.

And that really brings me to another thought about the leftovers. When the people had all eaten they could, Jesus directed that the leftovers should be collected. And the text tells us that twelve basketsful were gathered.

Now why would Jesus want to have these leftovers gathered up? Was he afraid he couldn't repeat the miracle the next day if people needed to eat? No, surely that wasn't the point.

The point is that God's blessings should not go to waste. To turn God's abundance into our scraps is to be disrespectful, ungrateful and poor stewards.

This is a “Youth Sunday” and I want to say something particularly directed to our young people. Your grandparents probably lived through The Great Depression. And your parents certainly were told about it. But until the last month or so, you may never have heard of The Great Depression.

The Great Depression was a time of real poverty in our country. Many people lost their homes and jobs because of the economic crisis that enveloped our nation. That was combined with the dire effects of having abused the environment and causing widespread wind and soil erosion of the topsoil resulting in land that would not yield good crops for many years to come.

People who lived through The Great Depression and the Dust Bowl years were changed by the experience. Most of them became very careful not to waste anything...because they knew what it was to have to do without.

The current generation of young people tends to be very wasteful. I'm not saying that every one of you is but this generation, as a whole, tends to be very wasteful.

- Expect a snack every time you turn around.
- Take a bite and if it isn't all you thought it might be, throw it away and get something else.
- Insist on every new gadget, every new toy and all the designer clothes that hit the market.
- Don't bother to take good care of what you have received because, after all, there's plenty more where that came from

You may have trouble understanding why some of the adults warn you about being wasteful. They have experienced hard times when they knew what it was to go to bed hungry, get up hungry and be hungry all the next day. They knew what it was to wonder if there would be food to eat and clothes to wear tomorrow. And they knew what it was to be grateful for an apple and an orange for Christmas...and nothing else. They knew what it was to live like that and, if our economy doesn't turn around, you may know what that is like, too.

But there is another reason not to be wasteful. We are stewards of everything that God has given us. That means, we are His servants, responsible to give an account for everything with which He has entrusted us. If He has given us abundance, more than what we need just to survive, we are responsible for how we use the rest. God's blessings ought not to go to waste. We must discover ways to use them to bless others.

- II. After the GRATITUDE comes the GREED.** The day after Thanksgiving is, traditionally, one of one of the busiest shopping days of the year. We have one day of the year that is set-aside for a national day of gratitude. The very next day, as a nation, we go on a feeding frenzy at the retail stores, snatching up bargains and fighting over the discounts.

You probably saw on the news that, in a Long Island, New York Wal-Mart, a 34 year-old Wal-Mart employee was trampled to death by stampeding crowds that were racing to get to the discounts. Person after person, with total disregard for the fate of the man on the floor, trampled on him to get into the store ahead of the other shoppers. For several minutes, no one helped him. For several minutes, not one person seems to have given the battered, bleeding and dying man a second thought. What a graphic portrait of greed!

After Jesus fed the 5000, he sent them away to their homes. In John's account of this miracle, found in chapter 6, John tells us that the next day,

the people came back to where Jesus had been. But he wasn't there any more. He had gone to the other side of the lake. So the people traipsed all the way around the lake and found him. When Jesus saw them coming, he recognized their greed.

²⁶ *Jesus answered, "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. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."*

I am sure the people were grateful when Jesus fed them. That meal they did not have to work for or pay for was an unexpected blessing. But by the next day, their gratitude had turned into greed. They'd been fed once; they expected it again.

Jesus confronted them with the fact that they were only coming to him for fish and bread. He warned them not to work for food that spoils but to put forth their effort "for food that endures to eternal life."

That is still a problem. People often telephone or stop by the church for a handout. They want help with their heating bill, help with their grocery bill, help with their telephone bill or just money for whatever they want to spend it on. I always ask if they have approached their own church for help. Invariably, they tell me they don't go to church. It strikes me as very odd that people only want a relationship with the church when they want a handout. I think I'd be embarrassed. And I think they should be.

But, you know, I've often wondered if we would have the same number of youth involved in the church if we stopped feeding snacks, stopped paying for skating parties and stopped funding so many outings. I've often wondered if some of the youth would pull out and go to another church if their food was better or if their giveaways were more generous.

The purpose of our youth program is to give the young people what Jesus called "food that endures to eternal life" and not just sodas and snack cakes.

What happened with the feeding of the 5000 should be a warning to us about the danger of greed coming right on the heels of gratitude.

There is another observation I'd like to make from the miracle of the feeding of the 5000. Did you notice what Jesus did right after the people went home? He went off by himself to pray.

III. **After time with FRIENDS AND FAMILY, time with THE FATHER.**

The holidays can be a hectic time. We love Aunt Myrtle and Uncle Fred and it is great to spend time with them. But the crush of family and friends

can distract us from the meaning of Thanksgiving and the significance of Christmas.

I'm not suggesting that you cut off all ties with your friends and family but I certainly think we can learn from the example of Jesus. If even the divine Son of God needed to get away by himself to pray, who are we to think that the distractions won't distract us from our relationship with God?

CONCLUSION:

After Thanksgiving, what then?

Leftovers. Surplus. God's super-abundance! After we give thanks, God blesses in excess of what we can think, ask or imagine...not necessarily in material terms but in very real ways, God blesses us more and more and more.

After Thanksgiving, what then?

There is no reason for us to get caught up in the consumer feeding frenzy that has marked and marred the day after Thanksgiving and has given a new meaning to the term "Black Friday". If we are authentically grateful, we won't feel the need to feed the greed.

After Thanksgiving, what then?

Time with the Father. What we need is time to refresh; to restore; to renew.