

Of the 32 different miracle stories found in the gospels, this one -- the feeding of the 5,000 -- is the only one recorded in all four gospels. It obviously was of great importance to the early church.

Some suggest it was read regularly when early Christians gathered at the Eucharist. Others suggest that it shows a parallel to God's provision of manna from heaven for the children of Israel.

More important than any of these reasons, this account of the feeding of the five thousand was treasured by the early church because it taught Christians the very heart of the gospel message and was a deep source of hope and inspiration for Christians who were seeking to be faithful against great odds.

Matthew 14:13-21

I've wondered before at the compassion Jesus had to muster for the crowds that afternoon, when all he really wanted was to be alone to grieve after learning that his cousin and friend, John the Baptist, had just died. It's amazing to think about all of the people he must have healed or taught or sat down to listen to, in the midst of his grief. And I've always wondered what it was that he said to himself when he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke that bread, before doing what he did with it.

Sure, the disciples are still skeptical. Yes, Jesus does whatever he does to make the food go as far as it did. But what he says and what the disciples do is even more profound and powerful if you ask me: "You give them something to eat." Don't send them away. Don't look for a way out. "You give them something to eat."

And don't we sound and act like the disciples too much of the time? We don't have enough bread - whether that means time, or money; energy, willingness,

or ability; faith, love, compassion, or whatever. “God – take care of those needs I see around me.” We’re skeptical. We’re pessimistic. We’re preoccupied, distracted, lazy, uninspired, selfish, insecure, unconvinced – just like those disciples were that day. A lot of the time, if you’re anything like me, you’re just downright full of excuses.

But just like the disciples in the Gospel, Jesus gives us something greater than even our best excuses. He gives us more than just another miracle, too. He gives us something better even than bread and fish to chew on. Jesus reveals to us just what a high opinion God has – not only of the lost and lonely; the sick and needy people on that hillside that day for whom he shows so much compassion – but Jesus reveals to us what a high opinion God has of those who believe in and who want to follow him so faithfully.

What I hear Jesus saying is, “Don’t wait for someone else to do it.” “Don’t pretend you don’t have the time or the skills or the resources to do God’s bidding in the world.” “Don’t pretend you’re not qualified or capable.” “Don’t put it off for another day or time or moment when it might be more convenient for you.” “Don’t hope for someone else to do it.” “Don’t even wait for me to do it in your place.”

But — how? How could they do that? they ask. They don’t have enough food to feed so many. They figure there must be at least 5,000 people (and scripture tells us 5,000 men besides women and children) there. They are not prepared to feed such a crowd, and don’t have the money to buy enough food. They found 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish, but what were they in such a large crowd? How could they give them something to eat?

You know what? There was something the disciples had forgotten how to do. They had forgotten how to count. Not in the traditional way, but by Jesus’ way, a “new math” of plenty!

Now it has been a while since I have had to sit down and do math with my kids. However, thinking back about doing math homework with them, I was completely lost and had no clue. “New math” was just that to me! It was new ways to figure out math problems that I didn’t understand. So, I can relate to the disciples.

The disciples saw the situation by the following mathematical equation: (5 loaves plus 2 fish) divided by (5,000 people) = a desperate need they could not meet. They know how to “count” in the sense of world, but they did not know how to count in Jesus’ new way, the “new math” of plenty! They forgot one important factor in the equation – JESUS. They forgot that, whatever they had, Jesus could take it and bless it and use it for His work and will in the world.

Jesus can take small things and do powerful things. Here’s how the true mathematical equation the disciples were facing in trying to feed the 5,000 should have looked like:

(5 loaves + 2 fish) plus JESUS divided by (over 5,000 people) = A Miracle!

Aren’t there times we feel so overwhelmed by needs around us in world and community that we just want to get away? Aren’t there times we feel like saying:

“God, surely you don’t expect me to take care of all these needs! What I have to offer is so small and it won’t even come close to addressing the need or not make much of a difference at all!”

“God, what I do have to offer, will get forgotten or drowned out by other voices because I am just one voice.”

Like the disciples, we forget how to count, not by the world's standards, but by Jesus' "new math" of plenty!

How can we do all God has called us to do?

How can we find enough to meet the needs of so many people?

How can we visit the sick, console the distressed, find a word of hope for others, and help those who desperately need it?

Well, the task is obviously impossible, but, like the disciples, if we will simply do what we can and depend on Jesus for the rest, things will get done.

Isn't there some way each of us might feed someone, too? Maybe it's that co-worker you know could use a hand or some encouragement... Maybe it's a neighbor who's having a hard time... Maybe it's something around the church when we are back together – helping with Sunday school, sharing a meal, starting a new small group of your own. Let's not wait for someone else to do it. Let's not pretend we aren't capable or qualified or called, even, to respond to the needs around us. And let's not wait for Jesus to do it all by himself.

This story before us today is a word for every weary disciple, and a word for us. Although we may feel we are confronted with impossible expectations we are supported by Jesus' promise to give us more than enough to reach out to those in need if we will just do it.

Let's wonder about the miracle of Jesus. But let's think about our mission here, too – as a congregation and as individual followers of Christ. Let's hear Jesus' command to give the world something to eat. And I don't necessarily mean physical food but let us consider how we can give the world something to eat with all the issues of Covid and social issues. Despite what we may feel we have to offer, with God, we can offer what we have, and it will be enough.

The children's time this week is The Story of Stone Soup.

Brief run through of the story

Moral: By working together, with everyone contributing what they can, a greater good is achieved.

Franklin Roosevelt said that "the test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little."

Let's realize that we have all we need to make that happen – that because of God's love for us, we *are* called and capable of doing the work of Christ in and for the sake of the world – and that when we do, there will be more than enough of that love and grace and hope to go around – with leftovers besides.