

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
Edina, Minnesota  
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Feeding of the 5,000 | Matthew 21:1-11**

As I watched the kids, I just couldn't help thinking how clueless I was at their age and how far they are ahead of me. When the Bible is either missing from your life, or shoved down your throat, or banged over your head, you tend not to listen to it like the greatest story ever told. I couldn't help thinking those kids heard the story come through the side door so that twenty years from now they may forget everything they ever learned in sermons, but they'll remember the music, they'll remember the images, and they'll be talking about what it's like to really be hungry and how God can feed thousands of people. Our prayer is that will happen for you, too.

This season between now and Easter we're talking about hunger. What are you hungriest for? We're using the images found in the meals of the Bible to talk about times when there was an overabundance of food and times when there wasn't enough; to look into our hearts and say, "What are we really hungry for?" Last week Carrie told a story from the Old Testament about a woman who literally was starving to death—she had no food and at the very end of her rope learned to trust God for just one more meal, and then just one more meal—and it changed her life. And today's story has five thousand people hungry and it says:

<sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, Jesus had compassion on them. [Matthew 9:36]

The thing is, the only thing Jesus never sees is a crowd. He doesn't see a crowd because He knows who Tim is, and He knows Irma, and He remembers Sam, and each one of those stories involves someone who's hungry, or confused, or anxious, or guilty, or maybe it's not them, maybe it's somebody that they love who is hungry and they can't feed them. You know, there are only—of all the miracle stories in the Bible—there are only two that appear in all four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The one you can assume is the death and burial and resurrection of Jesus, that one is in all four of the Gospels. The other is the story the kids tried to learn and tried to tell us—the feeding of the five thousand. It's in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in different places, and I thought I'd read it the old fashioned, boring adult way.

<sup>13</sup> Hearing that Jesus had left town by boat, the crowds followed Him on foot.

<sup>14</sup> When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed the sick. <sup>15</sup> As evening came, 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." <sup>16</sup> Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." <sup>17</sup> "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. <sup>18</sup> "Bring them here to me," he said. <sup>19</sup> 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 for what was in his hands and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. <sup>20</sup> They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve baskets of broken pieces that were left over. <sup>21</sup> The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children. [Matthew 4:13-21]

That's the story that appears in all the different accounts of Jesus. Since the kids have really told us this story well, I'd like to make just one point and then talk about application. One of the things that you need to tell the kids, whether your own kids, or your grandkids, nieces, nephews, or friends, it's really not how much of the Bible that they read that counts, or that they understand, or that they agree with that counts, it's what they do with what they understand. I'm going to give you an assignment, a takeaway, on the story we've read. The only thing I wanted to say about this story is that it's clear that Chuck Swindoll was right. He says, "We're all faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations." A series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations. This is an impossible situation, but the key is not the problem; the key is who is with us to solve the problem. What the disciples see as a problem, Jesus sees as an opportunity. I need to remember that. What I see as an impossible problem, God sees as an opportunity for me to learn something I never would if I could manage it myself. And in the story it says when we are thankful, when we give thanks for what we have, not for what we don't have, but for what we *do* have, when we thank God for it, He uses it to bless other people. That's the only point I wanted to draw, the kids have shown you lots of others.

The action steps, though—there are two steps I'd like you to take—the first one is that the main emphasis in this story is on the meal. Do not settle for the meal, find the cook. The important thing is not the meal; the important thing is the cook. The people were excited about the meal, but what they needed was the cook. The next story that happens after John talks about the feeding of the 5,000, the next thing he says is that a couple of days later Jesus turned to the crowd and said, *I tell you, you're not looking for Me because you saw the marvels I performed, you're looking for Me because you ate the food and you're stuffed. Don't look for food that spoils; look for food that leads to eternal life, which only the Son of God can give you.* Don't settle for the meal, find the cook. Some of you are stuffed and when we are comfortable we tend not to look for the cook, we tend to do it on our own. Some of you are hurt, or angry, or starving, or lonely, or anxious. What you want is somebody to fix your problem and to you I say *find the cook wherever you are.* That's action step number one. Do you know the cook?

The second thing is that what the disciples saw as a problem, Jesus saw as an opportunity. Now what I think He should have done—I think He should have just snapped His fingers and boom! Thanksgiving turkey meal in front of everybody—5,000 people. They would have had the turkey, and the stuffing, and the mashed potatoes,

and the wine. But He didn't do that, did He? Instead, He got the disciples into the game. He said, *well, what do you have? Let's work with what you have.*

I am reminded me of a story I was reading this last month about the early NBA. Philadelphia was playing Boston and a rookie gets into the game for Philadelphia. He's running around like crazy, it's his first NBA season, he runs around and he gets one rebound. One rebound. That's not the headline of the story. The headline of the story is that in the same game, Wilt Chamberlin was also on his team and he got 55 rebounds for an NBA record. That's the story in the newspapers, but what happened was that the rookie called his mom and said, "Hey mom, Wilt and I got 56 rebounds." That's the way God wants to work with us. God is thrilled when we get one rebound or even when we just show up and get on the court.

God is a lot more happy with those children than you and I are, the proudest grandpa is here. God loves it that they stepped forward. The first time God seems to bless a particular person is with Abraham. He made a promise to Abraham: I will bless you and all your descendants and I'm going to bless you so you can bless the world. You are blessed. You're fed. You are to bless and feed other people.

So here's our action step for the week. I'd like you to invite somebody to a meal to share what you've been given. Maybe it's having somebody over for a casual dinner, maybe it's going out to eat, maybe it's just a cup of coffee, but invite somebody, a friend, a family member. Get together and at that meal, say one thing that you're thankful for. Don't make it a big deal, just say one thing that you're thankful for because you've been blessed and now you have the chance to bless others.

See what God does with that small beginning, and the reason for this is that there's a spiritual corollary here. In our musical, who was the Old Testament figure that Jesus was like when he fed the people? Who was he like? He was like Moses. Right. In the story where the people from Israel are fleeing Egypt, they're out in the wilderness and they're starving. Moses prays and God sends manna. Remember manna from heaven? They got it every single day. Manna literally means, "What is this stuff?" And they ate the stuff, but remember what happened when they saved the manna? They held it overnight and do you remember what happened? It rotted during the night and there were bugs crawling out of it in the morning. When you and I are blessed and we don't learn how to share, things get stale and begin to rot. We never have enough, but when we look at what God has given us, we we share our coffee, or our dessert, or our meal—even if it's only a little—and we say something that we're thankful for, because food doesn't rot anymore when God multiples. Let's pray.

God, I thank You so much not just for this story of hope, of the impossible

circumstances, but I thank You that when You are all we have left, You are all that is needed. Thank you that You are faithful, that You love these children, that You love all the kids that saw this, that You want to remind each one of us who hunger that when we turn to You, You offer us maybe not all that we wanted, but all that we needed for that day, and You teach us to share with someone else. Together we give thanks. In the name of our loving Savior, amen.

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