

“Enough for Everyone”  
Matthew 14:13-21

Pastor Mark McDaniel  
August 6, 2017

In Bernie May's book, *Learning to Trust*, he tells us of Eunice Pike, a woman who worked with the Mazatec Indians in south-western Mexico for forty years. During that time, she discovered some interesting things about these beautiful people. For instance, the people seldom wish someone well. Not only that, they are hesitant to teach one another or to share the gospel with each other. If asked, "Who taught you to bake bread?" the village baker answers, "I just know," meaning he has acquired the knowledge without anyone's help. Eunice says this odd behavior stems from the Indian's concept of "limited good." They believe there is only so much good, so much knowledge, so much love to go around. To teach another means you will drain yourself of knowledge. To love a second child means you have to love the first child less. To wish someone well - "Have a good day"—means you have just given away some of your own happiness, which cannot be reacquired.

How many of us, in the world today, live with a similar fear that by giving away something important to us, we will have less of it—that it might be used up—that we should hold onto it with all of our strength? When my daughter, Jessica, was young, she would get quite upset if we ran out of something. If we ran out of milk, she would become anxious that we would never have milk again. If I poured the last bit of Cheerios out of the box, into my bowl, she was concerned that we would never have Cheerios again. I am not sure where this fear came from, but I don't know how many times my wife and I had to say to her, "We can just go to the grocery store and buy some more."

The account of the feeding of five thousand in Matthew 14:13-21 has been an inspiration to Christians for quite some time. Jesus and the disciples had just received news of John the Baptist's death, and they were seeking to get away. They needed some down time—away from the crowds; but, alas, that was not to be. The crowds continue to follow them. So, Jesus, being Jesus, takes compassion on the people and begins to heal them. As it gets later in the day, the disciples ask Jesus to tell the crowds to go away so they might get something to eat.

However, instead of complying with the disciples' request, Jesus' compassion continues, and he invite the multitudes to eat. The disciples are concerned because they only have two fish and five loaves, which is hardly enough to feed themselves, much less a crowd of five thousand—plus women and children. Jesus blesses what they have, and then instructs the disciples to feed the crowd. Not only did the entire crowd fill their hungry bellies, but there were also twelve baskets of scraps left over—a miraculous abundance of food! Or more accurately, the miraculous power of God's love.

This story teaches us that God is love. To begin with, Jesus is moved with compassion for the plight of the people. As much as he might like to get away and grieve in solitude for the death of John, the needs of the people come first. First, the healing of their broken bodies, and then the filling of their empty stomachs. Remember, compassion is more than just feeling bad for the suffering of others, but it is also doing all within one's power to alleviate that suffering. Jesus is showing his deep concern for the most basic needs of all mortals. In this event, it was concern for the broken and the hungry.

Another important lesson for us to take away from this story is an understanding of our role as disciples of Jesus Christ, and about the incredible confidence that God has in us. If you read the story carefully, you will see that Jesus didn't feed the five thousand. He told the disciples to do it. We have been entrusted by God to be the body of Christ - the hands, the feet and the heart through which God works in the world. We are God's miracles in the world. To be a true disciple of Jesus is to live and work as he taught us—to demonstrate our faith in tangible acts of love, justice, and compassion toward others.

Tony Campolo is a professor of sociology and a popular Christian speaker. He was once invited to a women's conference where he was to give a major address. These women were being challenged to raise several thousand dollars for a mission project goal. While Campolo was sitting on the stage, the chairperson turned to him and asked him if he would pray for God's blessing as they considered their individual responses to the goal. Campolo stood up, and - to the utter amazement of everyone in the auditorium—he graciously said "no." He then approached the microphone and said, "You already have all the resources necessary to complete this mission project right here in this room. It would be inappropriate to ask for God's blessing, when in fact God has already blessed you with the abundance and the means to achieve this goal. The necessary gifts are in your hands. As soon as we take the offering and underwrite this mission project, we will thank God for freeing us to be the generous, responsible and accountable stewards that we're called to be as Christian disciples." And they did.

A final lesson we might consider taking away from this story is that when faced with challenges and obstacles that seem overwhelming and unachievable, somehow God blesses us with the strength and the resources to achieve that which we thought was impossible. Can you imagine the look on the faces of the disciples when Jesus told them to feed the five thousand? Deer in the headlight eyes, and maybe a few jaws hitting the ground. The need was so great, and the resources so few. I have sometimes even felt that way in my ministry.

A number of years ago young Matthew LeSage, a third-grader, wanted to do something to help the hungry in his city. So, he started a program, Hams for the Hungry. In its fourth year, Hams for the Hungry raised \$40,000 to brighten the holiday season for people with limited resources.

Many, many years ago another young man, 13 years old at the time, read about Dr. Albert Schweitzer's missionary work in Africa. He wanted to help. He had enough money to buy one bottle of aspirin. He wrote to the U.S. military and asked if they could fly over Dr. Schweitzer's hospital and drop the bottle down to him. A radio station broadcast the story about this young fellow's concern for helping others. Others responded as well. Eventually, the boy was flown by the government to Schweitzer's hospital along with 4 1/2 tons of medical supplies worth \$400,000 freely given by thousands of people. This, of course, would be the equivalent of millions of dollars today. When Dr. Schweitzer heard the story, he said, "I never thought one child could do so much."

As disciples of Jesus Christ, have we discovered the power of the Holy Spirit to do great things for God? What happens when disciples join together in faith and unity simply for the purpose doing God's sacred work in the world? The promise to us of the feeding of the five thousand is that, together, trusting that God is with us, we can do miraculous things in God's name. It isn't a guarantee that things will always go smoothly and trouble free, but it is a promise that the Holy Spirit will be with us, and that God's will for the world will, in the end, triumph.