

Intro

Thank you St. Mark’s Presbyterian Church Moose Jaw & Knox Presbyterian Church, Briercrest for having me and my friend, Samuel, to be with you during this summer as we minister to you as summer ministry students.

I am so thrilled and honored to have this opportunity to share life with you this summer.

Conflict

I would like to begin with a little Bible trivia for you today (I hope you don’t mind). Bible trivia: **Of all the miracles Jesus performed in the Bible, how many of those miracles appear in all four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John)?**

Wait for a moment.

The answer is one. (well, if you count the accounts of his resurrection as a miracle of his own doing then it would be two, but most people don’t associate the resurrection with the miracles that Jesus performed.) It’s the story we read today about feeding the five thousand with two fish and five barley loaves.

This miracle appears in all four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The version we read today is the one in John.

Now it’s easy to get confused when discussing feeding the five thousand because according to some other readings it happened twice, not once. In addition to the one we read today, the gospels in [Matthew 15:29-39](#) and [Mark 8:1-13](#) include Jesus and the disciples feeding **four thousand** people with **seven fish and “a few” loaves**. In that account the disciples picked up seven baskets full of leftovers. So don’t get confused between the story of Jesus feeding

the five thousand with the story of Jesus feeding the four thousand. Our reading for today focuses on the five thousand.

The passage we read today from John happens right after Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath, and gets into a debate with the religious officials who are upset that he did. Jesus tries to convince the religious leaders that he is, indeed, the Messiah, but they are stubborn and hard-hearted and don’t want to believe it. They just don’t get it.

So Jesus withdraws by going to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, but the problem is that large crowds followed him. Jesus just can’t get any rest. He goes up on a mountain and starts teaching, but the crowd continues to get larger and larger.

And knowing that these people are hungry, Jesus asks Phillip where they are going to be able to buy bread to feed everyone. Now it’s not

that Jesus didn’t know the answer, but he was basically testing the disciples and setting them up for what was about to come.

Phillip responds by showing off his math skill as he told Jesus that even six-months wages wouldn’t be enough to buy bread for everyone. As Philip is arguing with Jesus using his so-called math skills, Andrew goes out and sees whether someone has something to eat then he points out the young boy with five loaves and two fish, and that is what Jesus uses to perform the miracle.

Now there are some significant things about this story that I think we need to know. First of all the gospels tell us that the boy had *barley* loaves of bread, not *wheat*. Barley is a grain that is still grown today. Barley is the earliest grain to mature. Barley has a shorter life cycle than wheat and oats, so it is the grain that becomes mature first.

Why is it significant for us to know?

Diagnose

It is significant because it tells us what kind of bread it was: Verse four tells us that the “Jewish Passover was near.” The Jewish Passover is a festival to celebrate the exodus of the Israelites from the Egyptian slavery. The Passover begins on the 15th day of the month of Nisan, which typically falls in March or April of the Gregorian calendar. The 15th day begins in the evening, after the 14th day, and the seder meal is eaten that evening.

Now the seeds of barley, wheat, oats and other grains are sown usually in November, and then the grain is harvested around April and May. Barley has a shorter life cycle than wheat and oats, so it is the grain that becomes mature first. That means the barley might

have been ripe but that the wheat was not available (unless it was held over from the previous year).

So, I am guessing that the five *barley* loaves this boy had might not have been for him and his family to eat, but perhaps was made from the first gleanings of the barley and thus was to be presented as a sacrifice for the Jewish Passover.

I’m no expert in the Jewish tradition nor in bread, but if I was to have to guess I would say that an omer of ground barley, perhaps about 3.5 pounds of barley flour, would make about five loaves of bread, which is what the boy had. Now this is speculation on my part and I may be digging too much into it, but I think it makes sense.

That is why when the boy gives the five barley loaves to Jesus he was still in effect giving it to God as a sacrifice, only instead of

giving it to the priest at the Temple he gives it to Jesus, the incarnation of God. By presenting this fact, John emphasizes the divinity of Jesus Christ as God himself!

And John has already done it in the beginning of his gospel when he writes, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”**

The boy not only has bread, he also has two fish. Now when we think of fish to eat we think of fresh fish or frozen fish. What the boy had was probably neither of those two things. Because fresh fish doesn’t travel well, the boy probably had dried or salted fish. We have to remember that the people at the time didn’t have a fridge or even the ability to freeze food, so much of it was preserved by drying and/or salting the fish. Drying and/or salting it preserved the fish and made it able to be transported.

However, since they were at the Sea of Galilee it could have been fresh fish, that’s certainly possible, but then we come to the problem of how to cook it on a mountainside.

So, why is it significant for John to tell us about fish? One commentary highlights that fish is theologically significant. Because one third of the disciples were fishermen and Jesus calls them to follow him, telling them he will teach them how to fish for people. In addition, the early symbol for Christianity, when it was against the law, was the fish symbol (known as “ichthus”). It’s still used today. There is even a saying, *“You catch ‘em, He’ll clean ‘em.”*

Now, let us not forget the star here. Who is it that has the loaves and fish to begin with? It’s the boy! Not the grownups, not the disciples, not the Pharisees, not the Sadducees, not the Scribes, but the boy. A kid.

Why? I think it’s the same reason that Jesus says not to keep the children from coming to him, because it is to them the kingdom of God belongs. I think it’s the same reason Jesus tells us unless we become like little children we will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

I have an eight-year old boy and I have been learning a lot from him. Children are hopeful. They are innocent, curious, and trusting. They have faith and find it easy and quite normal to believe in their parents when they can’t see or understand (illustration: Ben asked me about trucks). So I think it is significant that it is a child that provides the loaves and fish for the feeding of the multitudes.

And he gave all that he had. He didn’t have much, but he gave all of what he had.

I sometimes wonder if in giving the fish and loaves away he worried about getting in trouble at home? Would his parents be mad when he

told them what had happened to the two fish and five barley loaves. “We told you to take them to the priest! What happened to them? What did you do with them? Surely you didn’t eat them all yourself, did you? I tell you one thing, if you do, you are going to be grounded until the Messiah comes, that’s for sure!” Of course this is hypothetical. I tend to believe that the parents were there when the boy gave his lunch box to Jesus.

But again, we don’t know for sure, the only thing that we do know is that he did give his lunch box to Jesus. And everyone is thankful he did.

So, what can we learn from this?

Surprising Truth

Friends, *first thing* that we need is to realize that the overwhelming needs of our world are so huge and complex (e.g. the on-going

pandemic with its new variants, the civil wars in Middle East and African countries, the terrorist movements and the aftermath of ISIS in Syria, the climate change, the recent discoveries of the unmarked graves, and many many more out there).

And the *second thing* that we also need to realize is this: we have so little to give or to contribute to these overwhelming needs of our world.

However, today’s story reminds us of the *third thing* that is way more important for us to realize: **Christ can use our inadequacy along with his all-sufficiency to meet the overwhelming needs of our world.**¹

Good News

So, here’s the good news for us today.

When you look outside and you see the overwhelming needs of others and then you look inside and you see the inadequacies of yourself, don’t lose heart. If Christ could use the five barley breads and two fish of a young boy that is so unselfishly presented to Jesus as a sacrifice to feed the five thousand, then he could also use and bless our own “five barley breads and two fish” to feed the needs of others.

But the other side of the coin is also true. Some Christians I know when they look to themselves they feel so proud of themselves. They are rich. They are strong financially speaking. They have all their resources and connections. Thus they feel self-sufficient. But these Christians have forgotten how it all started. They have

¹ See: <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-31-how-christ-meets-needs-john-61-15>

forgotten that what they have now originated from small portions of “five barley breads and two fish.”

your Christian journey with Christ — you began with only “five barley breads and two fish.”

Resolution

Friends, I do not know where you are at right now as you see the overwhelming needs of our world. Perhaps you are at the state where you think that you are inadequate to feed the hungry world or perhaps you are at the state where you think that you are able to feed the hungry world by your own resources.

Whichever state you are today, today’s story wants to remind us all that if you feel low and inadequate, look to Jesus for he is able to use your “five barley breads and two fish” to feed the hungry world. But if you feel high and self-sufficient, do not forget how you began