

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, July 28, 2024. The Feeding of the 5000 from John 6:1-21 "Jesus Feeds Each of Us".

Today we get John's version of the Feeding of the 5000. We know this story... 5 loaves, 2 fish, and 12 baskets leftovers... right? What more is there to know? Well, A lot.

Did you know that the feeding of the 5000 is the only single story that appears 6 times in the four Gospels? That's the most. The next closest is Jesus turning over the tables of the money changers in the temple. That appears 4 times. This feeding miracle was important to the early church in their understanding of who God is and what God cares about.

At a minimum we can say God has a deep concern for those who are hungry, poor, or in need. There are thousands of scriptures that call the people of God to feed the hungry and care for the most vulnerable among us. Compare that to 8 scriptures in the Bible that talk about sex. Sadly, what does the global church spend the most time arguing about?... sex. We need to spend more time on the Biblical Mandate to feed people and lift up the most vulnerable among us.

John's version of the feeding of the 5000 is quite different from Matthew, Mark, and Luke's version. It is the only one that has a boy bringing forward the 5 loaves and 2 fish, and the only one that has Jesus feeding each person individually.

It starts off with Jesus seeing the large crowd coming toward him. He asked Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" Jesus said this to test Philip, who had already confessed his faith in Jesus. Jesus continually tests the faith of his disciples in John's Gospel to draw them deeper into an abiding faith. Philip responded with skepticism, like many of us would, "Six months wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." Philip responds with a scarcity mentality. Can you relate to Philip? Have you ever said we won't have enough. Or my gift won't help?

But as we will learn, our God is a God of abundance. Abundance is a theme throughout John's Gospel. In chapter 2, Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding at Cana and blessed everyone with great

abundance and the best wine for last. This all points to the abundance of God's grace for us on the cross and in the resurrection.

So, Andrew responds, there is a boy here with 5 Barley Loaves and 2 Fish. Barley was known as the bread of the poor. So, we can conclude this boy didn't have much. I wonder, why was he the only one to step forward and share? Was he on his way to market to sell the bread and fish? Was he bringing it home to his family? We don't know. Nevertheless, he gives all that he has to Jesus. Then Jesus commands the disciples to have the 5000 people sit down in the grass. He then took the bread and fish and gave thanks. John says, Jesus himself distributed the bread to those who were seated. In the other Gospels, Jesus employs the disciples to distribute the loaves and fishes.

There is something significant to this Jesus feeding each person in this Gospel. Jesus wanted to connect with each person gathered that day. He wanted to look them in their eyes and feed them. Also, Jesus has people sit down in a community. My guess is this was going to take a while to feed 5000 people individually. You would probably end up visiting with your neighbor as Jesus made the rounds. When is Jesus going to get to us? Jesus wants an individual relationship with us and for us to have a community. The Gospel says all ate till they were satisfied... until they were filled up. They got to enjoy abundance Jesus offered *in community*. In God's kingdom there is enough for every mouth to be fed and a little bit more.

And yet, our food distribution system is broken. Not all mouths are fed by the large conglomerates that control our food system. Groceries are expensive, even when you have jobs. Inflation has killed many of our budgets. It's hard to get ahead these days. This is why the church must be involved not only in feeding people, but in identifying the root causes of hunger and seeking justice.

After everyone was satisfied, Jesus had the disciples gather up the leftovers. Twelve baskets in total... hmm... one for each disciple. People will get hungry again, so Jesus calls on his followers to pass it forward. There is a basket for each of us too.

And from a stewardship standpoint, this is a story of generosity by the boy and concern for limiting waste. The leftovers were gathered up.

This story is known as a sign in John's Gospel. The word sign in is synonymous with a miracle. Would this miracle have happened without the little boy stepping forward and giving his 5 loaves and two fish? No. It took one person's willingness to let go their food and trust Jesus to do good with it. Did Jesus multiply the loaves with his great power over the cosmos, or did the boy's gift spark a miracle of generosity from others to bring their bread and fish forward? Either way, all were fed and were satisfied.

How is this text calling you to change if at all? We live in a world that likes to keep things for ourselves. We have a tendency to hoard or hold on tightly to our own bread to make sure we have enough. We assume someone else will step forward and give. But in this text generosity + community + trust in God = fully satisfied people.

What do make of Jesus wanting to feed each person individually? He wants an intimate relationship with each of us. This makes me feel good... that God cares about me and all that I am going through. Even today, Jesus is still pouring himself out in simple bread and wine in communion.

To the children and youth out there, this text should inspire you to step out and share the gifts and talents God gave you with a world in need.

And if you are feeling vulnerable or in need, the community of God wants to lift you up and fill you up.

There is enough in God's kingdom for everyone. May our gatherings honor this generous legacy (debi Thomas).