

## **Isaiah 25:1, 4-9**

O Lord, I will honor and praise your name, for you are my God. You do such wonderful things! You planned them long ago, and now you have accomplished them. You are a tower of refuge to the poor, O Lord, a tower of refuge to the needy in distress. You are a refuge from the storm and a shelter from the heat. For the oppressive acts of ruthless people are like a storm beating against a wall, or like the relentless heat of the desert. But you silence the roar of foreign nations. As the shade of a cloud cools relentless heat, so the boastful songs of ruthless people are stilled. In Jerusalem, the Lord of Heaven's Armies will spread a wonderful feast for all the people of the world. It will be a delicious banquet with clear, well-aged wine and choice meat. There God will remove the cloud of gloom, the shadow of death that hangs over the earth. God will swallow up death forever! The Sovereign Lord will wipe away all tears. God will remove forever all insults and mockery against God's land and people. The Lord has spoken! In that day the people will proclaim, "This is our God! We trusted in God, and God saved us! This is the Lord, in whom we trusted. Let us rejoice in the salvation God brings!"

## **Psalm 105:1-5**

Give thanks to the Lord and proclaim God's greatness. Let the whole world know what God has done. Sing to God; yes, sing God's praises. Tell everyone about God's wonderful deeds. Exult in God's holy name; rejoice, you who worship the Lord. Search for the Lord and for God's strength; continually seek God. Remember the wonders God has performed, God's miracles, and the rulings God has given.

## **Matthew 14:13-21**

As soon as Jesus heard the news, he left in a boat to a remote area to be alone. But the crowds heard where he was headed and followed on foot from many towns. Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. That evening 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 food for themselves." But Jesus said, "That isn't necessary—you feed them." "But we have only five loaves of bread and two fish!" they answered. "Bring them here," Jesus said. Then Jesus told the people to sit down on the grass. Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward heaven, and blessed them. Then, breaking the loaves into pieces, he gave the bread to the disciples, who distributed it to the people. They all ate as much as they wanted, and afterward, the disciples picked up twelve baskets of leftovers. About 5,000 men were fed that day, in addition to all the women and children!

# “Compassionate Giving Transforms Scarcity into Abundance”

Isaiah 25:1, 4-9 Psalm 105:1-5, & Matthew 14:13-21

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The feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle beside the resurrection that is told in all four gospels. In addition, Matthew and Mark also share the story of the feeding of 4,000. All six accounts are remarkably similar. The feeding has allusions to the Lord's Supper and numerous allusions to God's care for us. The feeding of thousands, caring for others, is a task we are to live in our daily life.

Jesus is on retreat to grieve the death of his friend and cousin, John. Someone sees Jesus, and word quickly spreads. The people are so hungry to hear Jesus' words and be healed that they make no preparations for physical hunger. They drop everything and run to Jesus. Jesus has compassion on them. Setting aside his own grief he greets the people, teaching, and healing them. The people stay all day and are hungry. Jesus is exhausted. The easy thing for Jesus to do at the end of this long sorrowful day is to follow the reasonable advice of his disciples who are tired and hungry themselves. The disciples are only trying to be helpful and do the most logical solution given the circumstances. The disciples said, “Send the crowds away before it gets too late so they can find shelter and food in a nearby village.” Not only will the crowd be fed, but Jesus and the disciples can get some much-needed rest.

The disciples have taken inventory of the situation: 5 loaves, two fish and 12,000 hungry people, limited resources, fatigue, and an overwhelming need. Jesus tells the disciples, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” Jesus regarded the feeding task to be the disciples' responsibility as it is ours today. Jesus knew they could do it. God does not lay a responsibility on us that we are not capable of fulfilling. But the disciples came back at Jesus, “We have nothing ...” An exaggeration, they had a little “five loaves and two fish.”

Can you identify with the disciples? Fatigue, limited resources, and an overwhelming need. They make excuses such as, “I have nothing,” “I'm too old for this sort of thing,” “I'm sorry, but I have issues,” “I'm too busy,” “I have already given and done my part,” “We should let some other group or person do it,” “I'm not ordained,” “I don't know too much about the Bible,” “This is not my gift,” “I got too much on my plate right now,” and the list can go on and on.

The disciples sincerely believed they were out of resources and that the only solution was for the hungry to own their hunger and do something about it themselves. In short, the disciples and perhaps many of us today don't believe we have enough to offer—certainly not anything that people can't get for themselves. Most of us, if we truly believed we will have enough left for our future, will give to help those in need. Afraid of scarcity we also say, “Send them away,” creating emotional distance. Those we ignore, or justify as another's fault, do not resonate with our compassion. Jesus modeled for us, to truly see others, to listen, to understand their need, to have compassion.

When Jesus told the disciples, “You give them something to eat,” they were unaware that they had the resources to fulfill Jesus' command. Jesus' point is clear: You give what you have, and I will take care of the distribution issues. The miracle was not only one of feeding, but one of opening the imagination and faith of those doing the feeding.

Jesus never kept his distance from the poor, the hungry, or the diseased. Having taught the crowd and having healed the sick Jesus wasn't about to send them away hungry. Like the disciples we are called to preach

the gospel, heal the sick, and feed the hungry. We are called to have compassion like Jesus, to be a community that provides spiritual and physical food.

The miracle began when a boy and the disciples were filled with compassion which enabled them to believe they had something to give, that they could make a difference. All Jesus asked of them was that they take what was at hand and use it. God would take care of the rest. Five loaves and two fish, give thanks, and give it to God.

We are surrounded with an abundance of food making it hard for us to understand the scarcity of the situation. A crowd of 5,000 men meaning probably 12 to 15,000 people in total counting the women and children would have been larger than the population of the majority of the urban settlements of that time. The crowd was slightly larger than the population of North Saint Paul. This crowd had not eaten all day and is hungry right now. There is no fast food, refrigeration, packaged food, grocery stores, or restaurants. Bread would have to be baked by hand, fish would have to be caught and transported to the people. The temptation for the boy to keep his five loaves and two fish a secret and eat them himself or to share them with his immediate family had to be tempting. After all, he had the sense to come prepared with this food. His family either invested half a day, hand milling and baking the bread, or he ordered and purchased the bread. Bread orders were placed a day in advance for the flour was usually milled at night and taken to the village baker in the morning. Meat of any kind was very desirable, but expensive, rare for the common person. Fish was highly desirable but often took considerable effort to obtain. The boy and his family are hungry. This meal would barely satisfy them let alone 12 to 15,000 people. It is absurd to give this food away in hopes of feeding the multitude; it is only a mere drop in the bucket. If he gives this food away he will not even be able to buy food without a journey possibly taking days. Certain the logical thing is to take care of himself and his family.

So many hungers, so few resources. The miracle begins when a compassionate boy gives everything that he has, the 5 loaves and the two fish, to the disciples. The disciples themselves were likely tempted to keep this food to themselves, but they give it to Jesus. When the faithful begin to act by sharing their resources with others, miraculous things happen. Trusting in God and acting with compassion, scarcity is transformed into abundance.

Jesus took what was given and blessed it, offering it to God in gratitude. Then Jesus proceeded to break what was given, so that it could be multiplied. The first action is taking what we have, then blessing it, and finally sharing it that all may have something. No one is left behind and no one is left out. In the end, everyone is fed, all are satisfied. God is a lavish God, dealing generously, multiplying much out of little. When we give something to God, the measure we get back is far greater than the measure we give. Our abundant God provides us with more than enough. Our investments in God will grow to abundant proportions.

Jesus was constantly taking small things at hand, a cup of water, a loaf of bread, a touch, a word of forgiveness, a smile, an act of love, and does what compassion calls for at the moment. He refused to be overwhelmed, either by his own need for comfort or the urgent needs of the people. Instead of anxiety about not having enough he gives thanks to God for what he has and shares it.

Scripture says, "All ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full." A lot of debate has focused on the mechanics of the miracle. Did God multiply the loaves and fishes or were the people so inspired by the sharing of the boy, the disciples, and Jesus that they all shared everything that they had? Multiplying or everyone sharing which would you consider to be the greater miracle? The fact of the matter is scripture doesn't tell us how the people get fed, so I can't either. Your curiosity will have to go hungry. But we do know how the miracle started and ended. It started with a compassionate boy giving everything he had; and it ended with everyone being filled, not able to eat another bit, with 12 baskets of leftovers.

Twelve baskets of fragments one for each disciple. The lesson to would-be disciples, you can feed people physically and spiritually. You have the ability to be compassionate. You have food. You have gifts and resources. Always have had and always will. There are no Mother Hubbards among us. No one is unprepared or empty-handed. How and where is Jesus saying to you, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.”?

When the physically or spiritually hungry come looking for food, when the sorrowing come looking for comfort, when the confused come looking for direction, when the bitter come looking for reconciliation, when the powerless come looking for strength, when the addicted come looking for deliverance, when the fearful come looking for courage, when the hopeless come looking for hope. Let us remember Jesus words, “They need not go away, you give them something to eat.”

We don’t know how miracles occur, but the gospel tells us that when the faithful have compassion moving them to act with faith, sharing our resources, miraculous things happen. Trusting in God, giving with compassion, scarcity is transformed into abundance. Amen