

 **Main Street**
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



John 6:1-15
“Jesus Is More Than Enough”

June 5, 2016
(3rd Sunday After Pentecost)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

JOHN 6:1-15 "JESUS IS MORE THAN ENOUGH!"

2 Nature Miracles (6:1-15 + 6:16-24), 7:1 Chiasm/Inclusions

A. 6:1-15 FOURTH SIGN (BREAD): FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND PLUS OTHERS.

Jn. 6:1-15, Mk. 6:32-44//8:1-10, Mt. 14:13-21//15:32-39, Lk. 9:10-17

1) vv.1-4 INTRODUCTION: TRAVEL AND HILLS WITH DISCIPLES.

6:1-71 = Sign 5 + 4 Dialogs

1 a1 After this Jesus went to "the other side" of the Sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. East, 5:1, 7:1 "After this"

Pre-Joshua /Exodus Setting Outside Land, Moses/Hill, Passover

2 2 And a MULTITUDE followed him, Mk. 9:15, Mt. 4:24, Kept Following, CHARISMATIC JESUS!

because they saw THE SIGNS WHICH HE DID 2:23, 3:2, Popular Healer, Kingdom Previews

Heals on those who were diseased. Chronic Human Condition, 5:36, 4:43-54, 2:23, 2:11

3 1' JESUS WENT UP ONTO THE MOUNTAIN, New Sinai? //Moses Ex. 32-34; 19:20-34 Disciples Follow/ Listen (1)

2 and there sat down with his disciples. Where? When? Who? Why? A Rabbi (Holy Man) Ready To Teach

Jesus Supercedes Passover, He Is The New Locus Of Divine Pilgrimage

4 b. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. Year Since 2:13, April, A.D. 32? 2nd Passover, Pilgrims To Jesus

Setting: Place + Time, Passover Haggadah: Crossing Sea, Feeding Manna

2) vv.5-7 1ST EXCHANGE: JESUS AND PHILIP/ QUESTION AND ANSWER. Hungry

5 Lifting up his eyes then, and seeing that a multitude was coming to him, 4:35 Harvest, Seeking Jesus: See 6:24

Q Jesus said to Philip, 1:43, 3:3, 7; 4:7, 5:6, 9:6, 11:24-44, 13:3, 18:4, Jesus Takes Initiative vs. Mk. 6:35//Mt. 14:15

6 Tests "How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" //Moses To God, Num. 11:33, Local Boy (1:44)

(This was to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.) Divine Gift Of Foreknowledge: Holy Spirit

e.g. 1:42, 48, 51; 2:24; 3:11-13; 4:17-18; 5:6; 6:15; 13:1; 18:4

7 A Philip answered him, Fails The Test Jesus Administers: Mundane Orientation

"Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread Disciple Are Tested/ Fail (2)

for each of them to get a little." 8 Months Wages, Financial Impossibility

When You Haven't A Clue, Take It To Jesus!

3) vv.8-9 LOAVES AND FISHES RECEIVED WITH A QUESTION. Boy Only In John

8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, Barley = Peasants

9 "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish; //1 Kgs. 17:7-24, 2 Kgs. 4:42-44

but what are they among so many?" Disciples Have No Clue, Jesus Greater Than Elisha

Start Somewhere! An Inadequate Human Contribution

4) v.10 COMMAND OF JESUS, DISCIPLES HELP PREPARE. Jesus Hears

10 Jesus said, "Make the people recline." Disciples Prepare People To Receive From Jesus (3)

Now there was much grass in the place; Mk. 6:39-40, Ps. 23:1-2, Historical Details

so the men sat down, in number about five thousand. Mt. 14:21, Plus Women & Children!

Enough Partisans For A Small Army

3') v.11 LOAVES AND FISHES BLESSED AND DISTRIBUTED. Lavish //2:1-12

11 Jesus then took the loaves, // Eucharist In Mk. 14:22, 1 Cor. 11:24 Took (1)

and when he had given thanks, Mk. 8:6, "Blessed are you, Lord God..." (2) Eucharistein

he distributed them to those who were seated; Mk. 6:41, Jn. 16:52-58, 9:36 (3) & Gave (4)

Feeds so also the fish, "We without God, cannot; God without us will not," Augustine

as much as they wanted. 2:6-9, All You Can Eat, Ex. 16:4, 5, 1; End Time Feast Is. 25:6-9

vs. Lk. 9:16, Mk. 6:41, Here Jesus Distributes Both (4:14, 5:21)

2') vv.12-13 2ND EXCHANGE: JESUS AND DISCIPLES/ COMMAND AND OBEDIENCE.

12 a And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, Multitude Filled, UNEXPECTED OUTCOME!

b "Gather up the fragments left over, 21:15-17, New Covenant Feeding, New Manna From Jesus

that nothing may be lost (perish)." 6:39, 17:12, 11:52, 18:9; Ex. 16:20, 24; No Waste, Didache 9:4

13 b' So they gathered them up Gift Miracle Of Multiplication, Discourse On Bread Of Life, 6:31-58

and filled twelve baskets with fragments 6:12, 39, 67, 70, Nothing Lost, New Israel! Mk. 3:13-19

a' from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten. Jesus Personally Nourishes The Multitudes

Disciples Conserve, Testify To Superabundance Of Jesus (4)

Rules? 1') vv.14-15 CONCLUSION: TRAVEL AND HILLS ALONE. Jesus Is Not A Violent Nationalist Zealot

14 When the PEOPLE saw THE SIGN WHICH HE HAD DONE, //Moses, Hungry Filled, Sign Causes Problems

they said, Ex. 16:1-36, Num. 11:4-9; 21:5; Dt. 8:3, 16; Josh. 5:12, Wis. Sol. 16:20-21 On Manna

"This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world." 1:20-21; New Moses: Prophet/King, Dt. 18:15-19; Jn. 4:42

Yes 15 No Perceiving that they were a out to come and take him by force to make him king, 18:36, End-time Manna, II Bar. 29:3, 8

JESUS WITHDREW TO THE MOUNTAIN BY HIMSELF. 2:25, Leaves, Disciples Misunderstand (5)

"And it shall come to pass when all is accomplished... that the Messiah shall then begin to be revealed. And it shall come to pass at that selfsame

time that the treasury of manna shall again descend from on high, and they will eat of it in those years, because these are they who have come

to the consummation of time" (II Baruch 29:3, 8). Thus, the Messiah was to repeat what the great Moses did earlier.

A Brief Treatment Of John 6:1-15

John 6:1-15 is the first unit in a long section (6:1-71) composed of John's fifth sign (feeding 5000) plus three explanatory units (6:16-24, 25-59, 6-71). Talbert notes that "The action takes place at Passover (v.2, 2:13), during the day (vv.1-15), at night (vv.16-21), and the following day (vv.22-71)" (*John*, 1992: 131). We begin in Galilee (v.1), move to the other side (v.1), then back to the Jewish east side of the lake at Capernaum (vv.24, 59). The journey to Transjordan evokes the wilderness wanderings, the gift of manna (bread from heaven), and the prophet/king Moses (v.14b). Jesus exceeds the Passover, as well as the food miracles of Elijah, Elisha (1 Kgs. 17:7-24, 2 Kgs. 4:42-44) and Moses. Judaism is fulfilled in Jesus who is the new locus of the divine presence. That John was written after Jerusalem's fall lends credence

John is careful in composition. "After this" (5:1, 7:1) signals a new turn. The structure is a 7:1 concentric pattern with a single center and three frames: 1-2-3-4-3'-2'-1'. At the center (4) Jesus gives a command; in 3//3' the words *loaves* and *fish* echo each other; in 2//2' there are exchanges between Jesus and his disciple(s) using *eat*. The inclusions in 1//1' are: *the signs which he did* (v.2) // *the sign which he had done* (v.14), *Jesus went up to the mountain* (v.3a) // *Jesus withdrew to the mountain by himself* (v.15b), *multitude* (v.2a) // *people* (v.14a). The standard form of a miracle story is used: problem (vv.5-6), action of Jesus (v.11a), responses (vv.13, 14-16). Our conclusion from comparing John's version with the Synoptics (especially Mk. 6:32-44) is that it is an independent treatment based on a common memory.

The introduction (1. vv.1-4) is elaborate with two travel reports (v. 1 *went to the other side*, v.3a *went up the mountain*), each accompanied by followers: a *multitude* (v.2a), *his disciples* (v.3b). The motive for the crowd is Jesus the healer, "because they saw the signs which he did on those who were diseased." The disciples' motive is that Jesus is their rabbi and sits to teach (v.3b). To the travel reports (vv.1-3) a religious time signature is added in v.4, "Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand." John's two internal footnotes, first that the Sea of Galilee is *the sea of Tiberius*, and secondly that the Passover is *the feast of the Jews* indicates an increasing non-local Gentile audience. Jesus goes to a symbolic location outside the Holy Land at a specific symbolic time for whatever happens next.

The next two components (2. vv.5-7, 3. vv.8-9) assume Jesus is the host, names the problem (a hungry mob), and records a revealing dialog between Jesus and Philip, then Jesus and Andrew. The question, "How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" is a test, since Jesus knows by revelation what is to happen (v.6b). Having seen superabundance with Cana wine (2:1-12), can they apply the insight to a new issue? No, they can't. The local accountant figures that even if they had 200 denarii, each would get only a snack. Andrew finds a boy with five loaves and two fish, then laments, "But what are they among so many?" The disciples do not understand who they're dealing with. They don't get it!

The pivot is Jesus issuing orders (v.10). Only then do we hear how enormous was the crowd, 5000 men plus others— a small army! As host, Jesus speaks a blessing to God over the meager fare and distributes it himself, and does so generously: *as much as they wanted*. The miracle of multiplication is not stated but inferred from the amazing results (v.12a). Jesus' next command to *gather up the fragments* reveals two things: 1) there is more than needed, and 2) the symbolic number 12 means the disciples eat at the end as *new Israel*. Not enough is more than enough as the Son cooperates with the Father and the Spirit. But there's more. When the people see what's happened (v.14a), they draw a biblical (v.14b), then a political conclusion (v.15): the first right, the second wrong. Jesus separates from the crowds and the twelve for their misreading of him as a violent warrior against Rome. Signs are ambiguous!

MORE THAN ENOUGH

“... *but what are they among so many?*”

The church before the world is always a dollar short, so we have to trust in God.

J O H N 6 : 9 b

In a 2013 article in *The New Yorker* magazine, staff writer Adam Gopnik made the following confident statement of what we do and do not know: “*We know*,” he opined, “... that in the billions of years of the universe's existence, there is no evidence of a single miraculous intervention with the laws of nature.” Later in the article, Gopnik concludes: “We need not imagine there's no heaven; *we know* there is none, and we will search for angels in vain.” Christian author Eric Metaxas replies:

“Of course, the reason [Gopnik] makes these statements has to do with his presupposition this world is all there is. That way of seeing the world dismisses outright any possibility of anything beyond the material world of time and space. As the late Carl Sagan glumly intoned, ‘The Cosmos is all there is and ever will be.’¹”

Gopnik is a noted writer among New York luminaries, and by his own confession a classic atheist, meaning this: for him there is no *Theos*— the Greek word for God, and therefore no mono-theism – no one God, and surely no Triune God, no personal Creator of all that is, no plan for the world, no heaven after death, no new world, no divine care for creatures, no gift of divine revelation unfolding over time to guide us, no answers to prayers, no Jesus except as a naive reformer ground up in the cogs of real world power, no grounds for the moral life except tribal custom and enlightened self-interest, no justice for the evils of this life or restitution for sufferings. For them life is just a cosmic accident composed of matter plus time according to the dynamics of evolution until the whole grids to a cold halt of entropy. We have no unique dignity as humans because there’s no one to bestow it. A boy is a mosquito, a human foetus of no more consequence than the egg of a sea turtle, and

¹ Edited, *Miracles* (New York, NY: Dutton, 2014), 3-4.

even less protected by law. The consequences are immense.

And since there is no holy and loving God on scene with us, all claims to miracles are ruled out from the start because the physics of a closed system of cause and effect do not allow such fiddling. There is no fiddler. Faith is just so much superstition and wish fulfillment for a Father who's not there and never has been, a pacifier for adult anxieties.² There are no wondrous events from a big someone because there is no someone. And so, if no God, then Gopnik is right, because whether or not there is a God, and if so then of what character, is life's most basic question, and once we come to a fork in the road on this issue, two different world views emerge that are fundamentally incompatible.³ Both cannot be true.

Now all this is a bit highbrow, but there are poets who've put forward the same ideas in popular terms, say in John's Lennon 1971 world anthem *Imagine*. It's a no-god world view in song, a lyrical anthem about a world without nations and their borders, without possessions and their claims, without faiths of any kind except our ability to make things right if we just sing his song and *imagine it*, and in that sense highly romantic and mystical, in other words what the Beatles were and what they became. A world of peace and plenty, of pleasure and unity as if there's no tomorrow and none watching from above. Lennon as prophet. You know the lyrics:

“Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try, No hell below us, Above us only sky
Imagine all the people, living for today

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do, Nothing to kill or die for, And no religion too
Imagine all the people living life in peace, You...

Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can, No need for greed or hunger, A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world... You...

² The continuing legacy of Feuerbach and Freud.

³ For a brief summary of options, see James Anderson, *What's Your World View* (Wheaton, ILL: Crossway, 2014).

And finally, in the refrain, an invitation to join the new movement:

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one, I hope some day you'll join us
And the world will be as one.⁴

Give him credit; *Imagine* is a song brilliant in simplicity, an entire secular world view compressed in a few words and offered to the world as a pop song. Billboard magazine claims it's the third greatest song ever written,⁵ so full of feeling and the fame of Lennon's persona you don't take time to analyze the claims he's making. It is the creed of an alternative faith, and you can appreciate its artistry and impact without uncritically swallowing its message.

Now opposed to the vision of Lennon's 1971 hit is another world view, a different perspective on everything. It's summarized in the church's God-centered Creeds with the full story behind these summaries unfolded in one Bible in two testaments, the Old and the New. There is only one supremely personal God, the maker of all that is, visible and invisible— including heaven above and not only sky. It's a God who defends personal property rights in the command not to steal and who created a nation when he took a mob of Hebrew slaves and gave them a promised land with borders. It's a God who by divine action started a new faith, Judaism, and after that Christianity as a modified Judaism re-centered in the person of Jesus.

This Supreme Being is near to all that is made but not to be confused with any of it; the biblical Creator and the good creation are not confused; reality is two things, not one.⁶ There is God, and then there is everything God made all the way down the great chain of being from the angelic to the inanimate. This God is literally one of a kind, holy, powerful, just, good, wise, loving, persistent. Not a male but a Father. And not many but only one, with all other supposed deities as spiritual imposters and frauds, distractions and idols all. And not far away- as some say— as a disinterested

⁴ www.metrolyrics.com/imagine-lyrics-john-lennon.

⁵ www.thetoptens.com/songs/

⁶ On this basic distinction, written by a New Testament scholar and boyhood friend of Lennon, see Peter Jones, *One or Two: Seeing A World of Difference* (Escondido, CA: Main Entry Edition, 2010).

observer but near, nearer than you are to yourself. This is the one, living, and true God whose story was first given to the Jews and then unfolded with more precision and insight in Jesus: why he came, who he was, what he did, what happened to him one Friday and the following Sunday, and what it meant for his first followers when he came back in a resurrection body as a promise of two things:

- 1) that his work through them was not over but starting afresh with his appearances and the coming of the Holy Spirit, and
- 2) that he himself was a physical personal preview of what was ahead for the whole world if you can believe it: a kingdom of resurrection bodies in a fully healed, restored creation, what Scripture calls “the new heavens and the new earth.”

No sin, no death, no evil, but everything suffused with the love and power of God, God living among us with an immediacy we cannot imagine. This is where our faith is headed. The God who made it all will restore it all with two exceptions. No rebellious angels are included, and no human person will be coerced to join the project, only the willing. God gives grace in order to enable our trust and full cooperation. And if you resist the light all your life, what is left but darkness? This is our old, old story, of a love that calls for us to learn to love God and then neighbor in return. It’s true, and it has tremendous explanatory power for the whole of this life and the life beyond this life that is promised to us. It is both spiritually and intellectually satisfying. It’s a true reading of who the one God is, what’s wrong with us and our world, and what God had done about it.

And if there is such a God, which we believe and in some sense know from reason and experience; and if this God is as involved at ground level as Jesus’ portrayed him when he spoke of the Father’s will and the Spirit’s effects, then when unusual things happen— which is what the Latin word *miraculum* originally meant, not an event which upends natural law but an event which elicits awe and wonder— then we have a framework in which to understand such things. God the novelist has written himself into the story as a character and agent. The lawgiver has bent the principles of regularity in favor of novelty to offer mercy and draw our attention. Our world is not a closed but a system open to the actions and energies of its Maker. We are porous to a God who works around the old physics of the fallen world with the new physics of the resurrection world. Every answered prayer is a window into a new creation that is already on the way. Every divine gift is an invitation to turn to the Giver for a renewed relationship.

Thus every miracle of Jesus, every act of divine power through him that caused wonder and awe, was both a gift to the recipient and a window into the preliminary operations of the kingdom of God. In Jesus— God the Son become flesh— a world of new possibilities was breaking into the old and rearranging expectations. So in this sense I’m not a skeptic but a believer, not in everything I hear or read because that would be naive, but with a deep conviction that God is active all the time, most often hidden, but sometimes in ways that cause shock and awe and wonder. I’ve seen enough and read enough reliable reports to know God does the unexpected.⁷ My question is not so much, Do they occur? but Why not more often?

You see, I know several people I care about who could use a breakthrough, a big enough dose of the energies of divine love to remove a problem: some in their bodies, some in their minds, some in life circumstances. All the care and medicine and counseling they’ve received thus far has just not worked very well. It may have sustained them— and that’s a good thing, but the issue remains. I know it will be removed at death for Christians, but what about now?

The plain fact is that miracles, or what the biblical writers term *signs and wonders*, raise as many questions as they answer. Why there and not here? Why them and not me? They have continued across church history,⁸ but not with the same intensity as during the three years of Jesus’ ministry where they appear— according to Jesus’ four biographies— to be a daily occurrence all the way up to his arrest with

⁷ See the magisterial study of Craig Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts: Two Volumes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011); also Robert A. Larmer, *Dialogues on Miracle* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), for a report from a Vineyard pastor, see Jordan Seng, *Miracle Work* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 2013); for the reasoning of an Oxford math professor and apologist, see John Lennox, *Miracles: Is Belief in the Supernatural Irrational?* (The Veritas Forum, 2013); for recent philosophical objections, see Mark J. Larson, “Three Centuries Of Objections To Biblical Miracles,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160 (Jan.-March 2003), 77-100.

⁸ For a sample, see Morton Kelsey, *Healing and Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1995); on the patristic period, Andrew Daunton-Fear, *Healing in The Early Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009) and James Carleton Paget, “Miracles in Early Christianity,” in Graham H. Twelftree, editor, *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles* (Cambridge, England: CUP, 2011), 131-148; and for a popular history, Francis McNutt, *The Nearly Perfect Crime: How the Church Almost Killed the Ministry of Healing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005).

the healing of a severed ear.⁹ The best and simplest answer is that if such events were common or at our disposal, it would mean the kingdom of God had already come, and it in fact has not so come. Just look around. We live on battlefield earth with casualties everywhere. Sin and death and evil stalk the world, taking advantage of every opportunity to bring pain and encourage unbelief. We have a preview of the new world in Jesus and occasional glimpses along the way to keep us encouraged, but it's simply not here yet. Night is passing, but the new day is not yet here.

TURNING TO THE TEXT

Interesting thing about today's story; it's the only miracle reported in all four gospels and twice in Mark and Matthew for a total of six accounts.¹⁰ The early church told it over and over as a picture of *Jesus at his best* and a preview of what the world would be like when the kingdom came to full expression: no sick, no hungry, people of all ages at a huge picnic put on by the God of Israel beside the Sea of Galilee. Can you hear the echoes of Psalm 23? "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters.... He spreads a table before me... my cup overflows."¹¹

For a short time- perhaps a few hours- Jesus, the disciples, and the crowds lived in an alternative reality.¹² It was as if heaven descended, and in a sense it had.

⁹ Luke 22:50-51.

¹⁰ When the feeding of the four thousand is included as a doublet, there are six separate accounts: John 6:1-15, Mark 6:32-44 // 8:1-10, Matthew 14:13-21 // 15:32-39, Luke 9:10-17. For an introduction to the credibility of the canonical gospels, see Mark Roberts, *Can We Trust the Gospels?* (Wheaton, ILL: Crossway, 2007); also Michael F. Bird, *The Gospel of the Lord: How the Early Church Wrote the Story of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 204-206 on John 6:1-15 //Mark 6:32-44, including comparative charts.

¹¹ Noted by Francis J. Maloney, S.D.B., *The Gospel of John* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 198.

¹² For a skeptical treatment owing to a consistent philosophical naturalism, see Marcus Borg, *Jesus* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2006), 73-75. Other treatments include John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking The Historical Jesus, Volume Two* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1994), 950-970; Keith Warrington, *The Miracles in the Gospels: What Do They Teach Us About Jesus* (London: SPCK, 2015), 195-204; for an

But the fact that Jesus almost immediately had to isolate himself from the crowds as soon as the meal was over indicates just how quickly things turn ugly when the old realities reassert themselves. Verse 15 reads: “Perceiving that they were about to come and *take him by force and make him king*, Jesus withdrew to the hills *by himself*,” meaning away from the crowds and also away from the twelve disciples because both had become infected with the same Jewish political fever that would destroy the nation in forty years. They wanted him to make Israel great again. “After all,” they must have thought,

“if he can do this, he’s the new Moses with fresh manna from heaven, a prophet and king in one, and what we need is a new liberation, not from Egypt but from the heavy footprint of pagan Rome! Five thousand men is an army! Others will join us in a march on Jerusalem. If he can bring provisions out of nothing and resuscitate the dead, how can they stop us? God is with us! We will follow General Jesus.”

The bubble popped as the new was interrupted by the old, the beautiful by the ugly, the kingdom of God by demands for political vengeance. Jesus walked away from the whole thing as if it was a great temptation disguised as populism– the voice of the people as the voice of God, which it was. He will not be used for our brand of world-improving political agendas. In his case it was one man against the whole world. He lavishly met the need for healing and food and teaching; he utterly rejected their political dreams and walked away, no doubt leaving the masses bewildered, “He raises our hopes, then dashes them. Who is this man? And what is he up to?”

With Jesus there was always enough: enough healing, enough food, enough love, enough time, enough wisdom, simply enough because of the Father and Spirit with whom he lived in deepest cooperation. Now if we use a little creativity, we can guess how the young boy felt after it was all over:

“Look what Jesus did with my lunch. Hey people! That was my lunch he used! I’m glad I took a risk and gave it away. I think I want to be his follower; better than that, I think I already am!”

In a world that prizes competence and self-reliance, Jesus desires a people who

African perspective, see Chris U. Manus, “Jn. 6:1-15 and its Synoptic Parallels: An African Approach Toward the Solution of a Johannine Critical Problem,” *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*, Fall-Spring 1991-1992, 47-71.

trust and obey him in the face of overwhelming needs and perpetual frustration. Discipleship is not about us looking good but about him getting glory through our weakness and our willingness. Philip whines that eight months wages would buy only enough *for each of them to get a little*. Andrew looks down at the boy's lunch and concludes it's hopeless, *But what are they among so many?* And they are the best Jesus has! A disciple is not a hero, not a fixer; disciples face a needy world with empty hands. The truth is that to follow Jesus is to always be on the verge of looking stupid. I think of the twelve as the *dirty dozen*, a *bunch of misfits*. But they would rather be with him looking bad than anywhere else looking good because where Jesus went, stuff happened. It was life on the edge of the kingdom, the finest education ever offered: walking and talking and watching Jesus work with people to put God's love and power on local display. And when he said No, he meant it!

Perhaps the great sin of the church today is our hankering for safety and predictability. We stay inside a stained-glass comfort zone and call it church. But whatever the *Jesus thing* is about, it's not about safety and having answers ahead of time. It's about him doing the impossible through the inadequate and the unprepared, which is us! And when people sense his mysterious presence among us, and when stories are told of his provision, then both pre-and-post-Christian people will seek him out among us. His bread is always fresh out of the oven.

For whatever reason- and we assume divine guidance- Jesus crossed to the far side of the Sea of Galilee, trooped up into the hills, and then- as rabbis did- sat down to teach. John notes it was nearly Passover, a time when God's people remembered the great events of the Exodus, including the provision of manna in the wilderness. But one greater than Moses is here. People should have been heading to Jerusalem, but here they are streaming towards Jesus because he's a healer, verse 2: "And a multitude followed him, because they saw the signs which he did on those who were diseased." All wanted to get near this man who exuded the loving fierceness of a God who'd come to make life whole again, so while Jesus went by boat, thousands walked around the north shore to be there when he landed.

Now the Father had already spoken to the Son about what was to occur. John lets us in on this through a footnote to verse 6, "...for he himself *knew* what he would do." But what a marvelous opportunity for a faith test. So Jesus asked my apostolic namesake, "How are *we* to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" Philip scanned the gathering mob and did a little mental arithmetic, "Two-thirds of a working man's yearly salary would give them only a little." Meanwhile, Andrew the activist had gone on the hunt. He uncovered a young boy's lunch: five small biscuit-sized loaves

and two little fish... but what are they among so many?” If they had no faith, even after the superabundant wine miracle at Cana, at least he could use them as ushers, so Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.”

Five thousand men are the estimate, so the crowd- including women and children- was probably ten thousand plus. Lots of ill, lots of hungry, lots of hopeful. And standing before them twelve goofy disciples and a calm Jesus with five hamburger buns and some mustard sardines. What a bizarre scene in the middle of nowhere, but Jesus is in control because he knows the mind of the Father and is willing to obey in this new situation. This is what enables him to step out in trust and draw down the resources of heaven so the invisible kingdom becomes visible in its effects. Like the father at any Jewish meal, Jesus takes and blesses God for the bread, then the same with the fish. And in the distribution the unexpected happens. It’s not that everyone takes out their secret stash and begins to share it because of the boy’s fine example which shamed them. That’s a silly reading. The miracle is not their generosity but his provision. Jesus takes the initiative; he feeds God’s people without requiring from them a correct confession of faith or a moral report card. That is one reason why we take the risk of an open communion table.¹³ If you want to do serious business with Jesus, you are welcome here, just like the crowds in our story.

The details of the distribution are lost. Did it multiply between the people? Who knows? Jesus fed them real food, soul food, simple food, “as much as they wanted,” John says in verse 11. Messianic abundance, a free *all you can eat* buffet as a foretaste of the great banquet of the kingdom of God.

There are no shortages in heaven, only here on earth. This church feeds the hungry poor every week. And when the leftovers were gathered, there was a basket for each of the twelve. They were again *blessedly humiliated*. Jesus set them up. They were exposed as men of little faith. Their *scarcity* mentality was not the truth.

A young girl was carrying out her Saturday chores with diligence. Her Father watched her sweat for a while, then asked, “Are you using all your resources?”

“Yes, Dad. Broom and mop and dust rag. What else is there?”

“Think again,” he said.

¹³ For a discussion of the positives and negatives of this practice, see the approved UM statement on Holy Communion, *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion*, at www.gbod.org/worship. And, at the same sight, Hoyt Hickman’s paper, “Admission to the Table and Recent United Methodist Debate.”

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“You haven’t yet used all your resources. You haven’t asked me to help.”

Miracles and misunderstandings always travel together, but that’s a risk God takes. Jesus meets genuine needs, healing and hunger, but he’s never under our control. He’s always free enough to walk off, not only from the crowds but from his closest friends and trainees, verse 15: “Jesus withdrew to the hills *by himself*.” He does not take orders from below; we cannot manipulate him with our prayers, our praises, our emotions, our piety or our gifts. He does not cooperate with our political dreams or time lines. His kingdom is bigger than a political program. Jesus will be crowned on a cross, not by the crowds, because we need more than a new political leader; we need a whole new world, and of that he is the preview.

CONCLUSION

If no one went hungry in America tonight, if every child was tucked in and prayed for by a mom and dad, if there were no homeless and crime was banished, it would be a great day for democracy and freedom, but it would not be the kingdom of God, which is much deeper and larger than we imagine. Death would still reign. Disease would still cause pain. Demons would still stand at the gates looking for an opening. The wrongs of our long history of sin would still not be righted. Our dreams of earthly utopias are not the kingdom of God. God’s reign is not about the gradual improvement of this world but its radical judgment and replacement, and of that we have a preview in the life of Jesus who is our window into God. We live in this world as it now is, and where possible we vote and strive for justice- even for love- but our hopes do not finally reside here, as the Nicene Creed reminds us in its potent last line, “We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.”

People everywhere are looking for something to satisfy the hungry heart. I know I am. And while some satisfaction is found in work well done, in family life, in hobbies and learning and amusements, or in a cause well served, there is a hunger beneath the hungers that will not be silenced. That place is reserved for Jesus Christ who today invites us to hear what none but the church can say, “The body and blood of Christ given for you.” This too is a glimpse of the kingdom of God. Bring all you are and all you are not to the table today. Someone has a gift for you
