

First of all, this is a new approach on this particular text I'm preaching today, and it's a little bit risky. I hope that you will stay with me.

Does anyone here know Roy G. Biv? Raise your hands if you know Roy G. Biv. Okay! We've got a couple of folks. If you've met him, I met him in high school physics. Roy G. Biv is just a way to remember the colors in the order of the visible spectrum of light, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet. The colors of the rainbow, the colors through a prism in the order in which you see them. That name is just a mnemonic device where the first letters of each word are of the name to remind you of the sequence of what you're trying to remember. Now, I made one of these up that sounds pretty crazy. I made it up in high school when I was trying to remember the 13 original American colonies. It was, "Never make raisin cakes, never, never, please don't make very nasty, salty gherkins." It works. You get all 13 colonies, and as always, Georgia is last, and as always, South Carolina is just before last. Work it out! You can get all 13 colonies. Now, I'm a little worried that I may still be saying that years from now when I'm in a nursing home, and they'll be tempted to diagnose that I have some sort of mental problems. I know that some of you think the time has already passed.

Now, hunters and hikers probably know this. Raise your hand if you know this one. "Red on yellow will kill a fellow. Red on black, a friend of Jack." You know that one? A few of you. The rest of you are saying, "What?" It is how to tell a poisonous coral snake from a king snake, which is not poisonous. It has the same color bands, but in a different order. Now, repairing old homes in Bamberg at Salkehatchie, every single year at the safety lecture we heard that, "Red and yellow will kill a fellow. Red on black, a friend of Jack." We heard that because down there they have coral snakes and king snakes. Now, would you bet your life on a mnemonic device, that you remembered it correctly? Maybe not. It can be very important to get things in the right order.

By now you probably have figured out that the title of my sermon is another mnemonic device, "My Dear Aunt Sally." A few of you know that one, right? No? You don't know. A few of you know, "My Dear Aunt Sally." That's the order to properly solve a math problem. If you have an equation, you multiply first, then you divide, then you add, then you subtract. If you don't have parentheses, that's the order you do things to get the right answer.

It can be very important to get the order of things correct. Now, when you feel like the disciples felt in today's Gospel reading, when your resources are low, and you're tired, and you're hungry, and you're in a desolate place, you need to remember, first of all, God can multiply, can multiply what little you have and make it more than enough.

John the Baptist, the one who prepared the way for Jesus' ministry, had just been beheaded, and maybe Jesus would be next, and you know that the disciples and Jesus wanted to get away from all of that. In Matthew, just before the story, it says, "Now when Jesus heard this (heard that John the Baptist had been beheaded), He withdrew from there in a boat to a lonely place apart." You know, when His friend Lazarus died that's when Jesus wept. Now, John

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the Baptist was His cousin and the forerunner to His ministry. When he was beheaded, He certainly wanted to be alone to regroup. What a monumental task to change the hearts and the minds of a world that would do such a malignant thing! What kind of world is this? The disciples were certainly worn and weary. They sought to be alone with Jesus and rest, away from the crowds for peace and for safety from people like Herod. They were tired. We've all been there, that kind of tired! Too tired to move, too tired to cry, I call that sleeping on the sofa tired because you're too tired to make it all the way to the bedroom. That tired! It wasn't to be. You see, the crowd followed them. They came and they came, and Jesus had compassion on them in spite of His grief for John and His desire to be apart and alone and rest for a while. I guess that's what compassion really is. Feeling with others so that their hurts become your hurts. Their needs become your needs. He spoke words of grace and forgiveness and truth to feed their souls, and He had pity on this teeming throng, and He healed and He comforted them, and He fed them.

The world operates, and too often, we as individuals and as church congregations operate on taking care of me and mine. Now, you have to see that Jesus' life is the very opposite. It's 180 degrees opposite from me and mine. His compass was set to compassion even when He was tired, even when it cost His life. Yours and mine are often set to just us.

Jesus did more than preach and feed the souls of the crowd. He did meet their physical needs. Jack and Carrie and Glenn and our youth spent last week denying themselves sleep and safety and comfort and air conditioning to help folks living in the need of just ramshackle homes and the need of somebody to give them hope. They gave it through the Salkehatchie program. New roofs, new floors, new insulation and wiring, and foundation work all done in Jesus' name. A few of them, I know because I've been there, probably thought, "I want to go home! I can't do this! This is a mistake! I shouldn't be here! I know there is a great need, but I do not have what it takes to be here!"

When you think you're running on empty and when you think send them away, we don't have enough money or we don't have enough time or we don't have the resources to help them, send them away, then you have forgotten the "My Dear Aunt Sally." First you give whatever little you do have to God, and God will multiply it.

After preaching and teaching and healing among the uninvited crowd, night drew near, and the disciples began to notice the faint growl of 5,000 bellies. I think I hear a few bellies right here. It was probably Judas, the treasurer, watching those drachmas, who said, "Now, Jesus, this is enough, okay. It's a lonely place. We're out in the sticks, and we were going to get away from everything, and they followed us. We did not ask them to follow us. It's getting late, you know. Let's send them away into the villages and let them buy their own food. What am I, my brother's keeper?" Peter the head of the Board of Stewards said, "Jesus, we need to address the food situation before these folks think that we are going to feed them." All Jesus said was, "They don't have to go away. You give them something to eat. You feed them." I'm sure Peter said, "I knew He was going to say that!" Then he pointed out to Jesus the sum total of all that they had was this little boy's lunch, five loaves and two fish, that's it! Peter meant for that to end the whole discussion, but Jesus took that little bit, and He multiplied it. He said, "Bring it here to me."

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Jesus, the Word of God made flesh, can change things and multiply even the smallest gift when it is given with the tiniest bit of faith and trust. We cannot stop God from showing grace to this hungry and often evil world of ours. We put His Son on a cross, an instrument of death and shame, and God turns it into a symbol of redemption and forgiving love. We mock Him with a ring of thorns, and He wears it as a crown. We nail Him there, and He forgives even those who hammered in the nails. We give Him five loaves and two fish, and with it, He will feed 5,000. God multiplies even the smallest gift when we give it with faith and trust. God certainly can work things together for the good, but you need to give God something with which to work. Even though your resources may be pitifully small, still Jesus says, “You feed them, you help them, you clothe them, you house them, you comfort them, you share the good news with them.” Take what little you have and give it over with a little faith, and God will multiply it.

There’s a true story about a 13-year-old boy, who once read about the mission work of Dr. Albert Schweitzer in Africa. He wanted to help, but he had only enough money to buy one bottle of aspirin so he wrote a letter to the Air Force. He knew they had airplanes. He said, “Would you please drop this bottle of aspirin over Dr. Schweitzer’s medical clinic in Africa?” Well, that story got out on the radio back then, and everybody else joined in. They thought that was a wonderful idea! Eventually, that little boy was flown to Schweitzer’s hospital along with four and one-half tons of medical supplies worth at that time \$400,000, all freely given. When Dr. Schweitzer heard the story, he said, “I never thought one little child could do so much!” You see in the story here, one child’s lunch fed 5,000.

That is the point more than the miracle. Take what little you have, give it over to God, and God will multiply it and make it enough. Too often we give God roadblock after roadblock. We say God I am doing all I can. I come to meetings. I come to church worship mostly. I come to Sunday school. I come to choir. I do a study once in awhile. I fellowship at breakfast, and occasionally come to Wednesday night. That’s all I can do. If you’re going to do more through the disciples of Main Street UMC, you’re going to have to find somebody else to do it. I’m doing all I can – my time, my family, I’m tired! I know some people out there need the basics of life, and they hunger for the words of life eternal, but they’re just going to have to find it for themselves – my schedule, my checkbook, my volunteer time, they’re all maxed out! Send them away! Lord, don’t I get a vacation from discipleship? Tell the crowds to go away.

Now, I do not want to say that we do not all deserve a vacation from time to time. We do need time to recharge. I’m going to take about a week some time soon, and I’m not going to apologize for it. BUT we are disciples even when the task seems impossible! We are disciples even when we are tired and even when we’re down to five loaves and two fish. Remember the definition of enough, of giving God enough, has always been all your heart, all your mind, all your soul, and all your strength, not more than you have, but all that you have. Remember God can multiply small gifts, small mustard-seed faith, that you do have. Don’t dwell on what you lack! Even God can’t multiply by zero. Just remember what little you do have, and trust God for the rest.

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I remember an incident that I've probably shared before, but it's an incident when I forgot everything I have just told you. An incident when I was administering as an associate minister in Charleston the indigent fund, and one day, I had my schedule in my pocket, and I was headed out the door, and along came an interruption. She was a downcast looking impoverished lady. She shuffled up the sidewalk, and she was looking down literally, and she was looking down emotionally. I thought to myself, oh boy, I've got ministry to do, and here is this stranger coming to distract me. I wondered what she wanted and how long her story would take, and I wished that she would go away! Like Jesus' disciples, I was thinking too small, and thinking only what I could offer, and I was bothered by the interruption. I'm not proud of myself, but like the disciples with five loaves and two fish and an uninvited crowd, I said, "What do they want? What can I do? Why don't they go away?" The end of that story is that lady did not want a hand out. She did not want food or gas or money or clothes or even a dime from the church. She wanted prayer. She just wanted prayer! She wanted only prayer and to know that she was not alone in the world because she was facing surgery the next day. She wanted the kind of hope that God offers through the church.

The world is full of starving sheep, and not all of them are starving for food. Some need only to know that somebody cares and to be reminded of the eternal hope we have in Christ. That hope cost God a great deal, but it cost us nothing to share. We shouldn't be stingy. As men and women and as a congregation, remember we're not limited to our budget or our training or our energy level or our skills. We have the very Holy Spirit of God available and within us to multiply our very small gifts and our very small faith to meet the huge needs around us in Jesus name. If we believe what we say we do, if there is salvation in Jesus Christ in this life and in the next, then we should not be shy about offering His love and His hope and His salvation to those we meet. It's not just the minister's job to speak of such things. Sometimes we're scared. Sometimes we're tired. Sometimes we're a little bit soul-hungry ourselves, but you are not limited to just what you have to share. Remember when you offer up even mustard-seed, tiny faith and trust in God, God will multiply that offer. Some people out there just need the tiniest reason to hope. You can give them that. You can give them that. Share your faith, your time, your talents, your treasure, and your compassion. Give these up to God, and see how Jesus' ministry is multiplied between the starving souls and starving bellies of the world.

I'm going to close with, and I've never done this before, a Garfield story. Some of you are Garfield fans. In one of his cartoons, he was shown resting droopy-eyed in bed, and he was thinking about, just philosophizing a bit, and he said, "One of my pet peeves is people who never finish what they start." That's what he said. That was a pet peeve of his. Then he cracks a knowing smile, and he says, "I happen to not be one of those people. My philosophy is to never start anything."

We are all reminded of our membership vows, our vows to God and to each other and to the world at the baptism of Ryan James Stone. We have all started something with God already, and it connects us to God and to each other. This Scripture reminds us that we are to live like it. When our resources are not up to it, God multiplies. Try it and see. Amen.