*YOU Give them something to eat* Homecrest PC

*Matthew 14:13-21* and *Genesis 32:22-31* 8/6/17

Yesterday I attended a backyard BBQ with a group of former co-workers from the engineering company that I once worked for. Even though that company no longer exists and all of the workers have been scattered all over the place, once a year we still find ways to get together, to celebrate the good time while catching up with one other. It was a pot-luck style BBQ/picnic event, that means everyone would volunteer to bring something to share with the rest. When that happens we would have a lot…and a lot of leftover as well at the end.

The question then becomes, what do we do with all the leftovers? Well, it would seem fair and logical that we all bring something home and not just a few people taking it all for themselves. Yeah, that makes perfect sense right?

Unfortunately, not everyone is as conscientious when it comes to the abundance and leftover of food. There are many people in this world who are still starving due to malnutrition and they go to bed hungry each night, while on the other hand we are throwing out tons of food into the garbage and wasting our drinkable clean water or other natural resources. There is a systemic problem and a wide gap between those who have and those who have not.

I’m sure many of you have been to diners where they bring out a basket-full of bread to the table, as we are being seated. One time I noticed the table next to us was a couple who didn’t even touch any of the bread in the basket. At the end of the meal, the waitress went over and asked if they were finished. They said yes and the waitress simple took away all the dishes, including the basket-full of bread. I was curious of what she was going to do with that basket-full of bread that was never touched. Sad to say that she simply tossed everything into the garbage.

As I was watching all this happened right before my eyes, my heart was greatly disturbed. My thought wasn’t at the couple who didn’t want to eat their basket-full of bread or the waitress who was simply doing her job of waiting the table. Perhaps the waitress could’ve asked first or if the customers would decline to take it in the first place. But it was too late. My concern was how that basket full of bread could’ve fed so many others who are malnourished and simply not having enough to eat.

According to a recent study from an organization called *Feeding America*, 1 out of every 6 children here in the US go to bed hungry (or are under-nourished) every night. Elsewhere in other parts of the world, in places like Somalia, 3 out of every 4 children under the age of 3 would die of hunger or malnourishment. These awakening numbers are quite staggering. These facts might seem difficult for us to grasp because, let’s face it, NONE of us here are really “starving” or malnourished. But that doesn’t mean that we should pretend that it is not of our concerns. God may be calling us to respond in action...to do something about it, in order to right the injustice of our society so that one day **ALL** may be fed, not only physically but spiritually as well.

In the familiar passage that we just read, we also read about a bunch of people who are starving...more than 5,000 of them, not included women and children.…so figure the total number would probably be 2-3x that. Believe it or not, this feeding of the 5,000+ was the only event that was recorded in all four of the gospel narratives. Each, however, does offer a slightly different perspective and emphasis of the event while addressing a different target audience. The one we read earlier was from Matthew, placing Jesus as the central figure of the miracle. The emphasis was all on Jesus as the ultimate miracle worker. I’m not disputing that. However, it would be interesting to see how we could also read this story through a slightly different lens as well. What about **the crowd**, **the disciples** and of course **the boy** who voluntarily surrender his meal that his mother packed for him, for the benefit of the larger group. Was he that generous or was he too naïve to think that those 5 loaves and 2 fishes could feed a multitude of 5,000 or more? Perhaps it was the little boy’s faith that made this miracle all possible.

Interestingly, if you notice more carefully and do a little synoptic comparative reading, the boy was NEVER even mentioned in our passage today. He was only mentioned in the Gospel of John’s version of the event. Hmmm….interesting isn’t it? Why wasn’t the boy even mentioned at all in the other three gospels? They mentioned about the food but not where it came from. Well, that certainly changed the whole complexion of the story, didn’t it?

**The focus quickly shifted to the ultimate motivation, courage and faith that this boy had demonstrated, while many of his adult counterparts, including the disciples failed to do.** Or perhaps Matthew’s attention was all focused onto Jesus and what miracle that he was about to perform. Jesus was simply taking advantage of the situation as it presented itself.

What about the disciples? What can we learn about the faith of the disciples, or lack thereof? They also played a key part of this miracle story. They were kind of caught in-the-middle as well. It was the disciples who first noticed that it was getting late and they have a real problem at hand with more than 5,000 hungry people in the middle of the desert. They needed to think of something quick. But in all fairness to the disciples, can we really blame them for a problem that they didn’t create. Was it really their problem to make sure that the crowd gets fed? The people should’ve brought their own food, or a snack, right? Can the disciples solve all the problems that are happening in everyone’s lives beyond their capacities?

Certainly the disciples were caught off-guard also. So what did the disciples do? They turned to their spiritual leader Jesus. Might the disciples just disperse the crowd and send them home… “*Hey, you’re on your own. Dinners are not included. Come back tomorrow morning and make sure you bring your bagged lunch and dinner with you?”*

When the disciples told Jesus about the situation, remember what Jesus said to them? Jesus told his disciples, “***YOU give them something to eat!”[[1]](#footnote-1)*** It’s not MY responsibility to feed them, but it’s YOURS!!! When Jesus saw the large crowd coming towards him, right away he noticed that the people were hunger, **not only physically but spiritually as well.** Our passage tells us that Jesus had “compassion” towards them.[[2]](#footnote-2) Immediately he turned towards them and began curing the sick and listening to the people’s needs.

As the 5 loaves and 2 fishes from that little boy were brought before Jesus, all Jesus did was ask the disciples to gather up what they had. After He had given thanks and Jesus broke the bread and the fish and gave them to the disciples to be distributed among the crowd….and miraculously there were still 12 baskets full of leftovers. What happened there?

Come to think of it, how often do we respond like the disciples by tossing our hands up in the air? Instead of attempting to do something constructive to address the problem, we complain, we point our fingers, and cast blames unto others. We made excuses and attribute our non-action to our lack of resources and informed Jesus that He needs to do something about it for us, when in fact, it should be the other way around. It was Jesus who was telling us that it is OUR responsibilities to fix the problem. It is OUR responsibility feed the hungry and the thirsty, clothe the naked, and visit the sick or the injured, and care for the widows and orphans. **“YOU give them something to eat!”**

So, what’s our take away out of this? Well, for one…that we should **have faith in what God is about to do, but more importantly have faith in yourself and allow the Holy Spirit to work among us and through us.** We might’ve been dealt with only 5 loaves and 2 fishes. They might not seem much for a little boy or for us to feed a multitude, but it was through the act of self-giving and willingness to share, that the seeds of faith were planted in order for God’s miracle to take place. Or perhaps it was the sacrificial giving of the little boy that inspire the rest of the crowd to share what they had brought also. **Transformation happens when one person is inspired to respond by taking actions.** If everybody brought something, we would have a lot…and with plenty of leftover as well. Conversely if nobody brought anything or is willing to share, no one will be fed.

Just remember that **we’re not the ones being asked to perform God’s miracles, but we are simply being asked to share what we have with others. By doing so, we sow the seeds of faith in the lives of others while making room for God’s miracle to take place.**

**God can use whatever we have** (like that of the little boy) and **God can** **magnify it in order to fulfill God’s purpose here on earth.**  **The greater miracle rests NOT in the distribution of the food or the act of feeding itself, but instead it rests upon the opening up of our hearts by sharing what we have with others**, whether it is our time, our talent, our energy, our space and our money. **It’s also not about how much we get to keep for ourselves but how much we are willing to share and invest in the lives of others.**

A few years ago, I was invited to participate in a continuing education event at Princeton Seminary that was funded by an endowment left behind by a very successful man named Joe Engle. Engle was a businessman who had no children of his own. Upon his death in 2010 and subsequently his wife’s death, it was part of his philanthropic desire to give away ALL of his money to others. Instead of investing his money in the stock markets to make him even richer, he invested his money in the lives of others. His established endowment supported many teaching fellowship, higher education and learning opportunities among church leaders, scholars and seminaries (including Princeton and Union). Joe Engle’s legacy lives on because he was willing to give ALL of what God has given and blessed him with. He did it graciously, willingly, and humbly much without fan-fare, name-recognition or attention, just like the little boy who was willing to give. **God’s grace is sufficient for all of us to share.**

**We have a tendency to focus** **on what we don’t have, rather than what we already have?** As the disciples became worried about how would they be able to feed all these people. They stared at each other and concluded that it was IMPOSSIBLE for them to do this or to do that. It was THEIR problem that they didn’t bring enough food of themselves. There was nothing that they could do but sending them away.

Internally those disciples were having their “Jacob” moment, as Andrew read for us earlier, about wrestling with God for their lack of faith and trust. They didn’t see what was possible through God’s perspective because they only saw it from theirs. They undermined God’s ability and power in carrying out miracles in their lives. Jacob wrestled and struggled with a messenger from God and ultimately God showed Jacob (in a painful way) who was still in charge. God reinstated and affirmed God’s covenant with Jacob and that He was still in control of everything of what’s happening all around us…for better or for worse.

What about us? How often are we like Jacob who are wrestling with our faith in God or like the disciples who are confronted with series of insurmountable trails and challenges in life? We have failed to seek God due to our stubbornness and reluctance of turning our fears into faith and trust? When we are faced with unexpected challenges in life from others demanding our compassion and mercy, can we simply ignore their cries, turn our faces, walk across to the other side, and pretend that it is not our problem beyond our capacity to solve. Jesus said, ***“YOU give them something to eat!”***

In a moment, we will once again come before the LORD’s table of grace and compassion. This is also a table intended for those who are sinners in need of God’s mercy and compassion, not those who are self-proclaimed righteous. This is also where God’s acceptance, forgiveness and transformation take place. As Jesus commanded us to ***“Go and give them something to eat!”* This was a call to action in response to God’s grace upon us.**

Every time we come to celebrate and remember God’s blessings towards us, we are reminded of God’s abundant flow of blessings – those 12 baskets full of leftovers are meant for us to share with others and not keep them for ourselves. Those 12-baskets represent the fullness of God’s people and God’s abundance of grace.

Friends, this heavenly feast is a buffet of God’s blessings poured out upon God’s people. Through this bread and this cup, **Christ has invited ALL people to be fed both physically AND spiritually.** Let us pray that the Holy Spirit would open our eyes and our hearts so that we may see God’s miracles of transformation take place not only in our lives but also in the lives of others. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Matthew 14:16* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Matthew 14:14* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)