



LAKESWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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*NOTHING HERE BUT FIVE LOAVES AND TWO FISH*

Matthew 14:13-21

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Every time I hear the story of the feeding of the five thousand, I'm reminded of reading about a man packing a shipment of food for the poor people in the hills of West Virginia that had been collected at a school in his area. He was separating beans from powdered milk, and canned vegetables from canned meats. Reaching into a box filled with various cans, he pulled out a little brown paper sack. Apparently one of the pupils had brought something different from the items on the suggested list. Out of that paper bag fell a peanut butter sandwich, an apple, and a cookie. Crayoned in large letters was a little girl's name, "Karen – Room 104." She had given up her lunch for some hungry person.

Karen sounds like a neat little girl (she has a wonderful name ... same as my wife). My guess is that the young boy who offered the five loaves and two fish was a pretty neat kid, too ... willing to give up his lunch to help someone else.



There is much to talk about in this passage we've read this morning. It's the only miracle to be recorded in all four gospels ... so obviously the writers must have thought it tremendously important. I suppose we could discuss miracles in general. Or, we could talk about why large crowds like that would want to traipse around the countryside after Jesus. We could even talk about Jesus' compassion ... his willingness to give up his much-needed quiet time after the murder of his cousin, John. We might even want to talk about our role in God's work ... Jesus gave the food to the disciples, who then distributed it to the crowd ("Go, thou, and do likewise.") Or we could simply focus on the generosity and unselfishness of that one little boy that we read about in John's account (6:1-13). There is any number of sermons here.

However, what I would rather focus on this morning is the menu, and precisely how little there was. Five loaves and two fish. Not enough. Not for hungry people.



Listen again to the disciples of Jesus: "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves."

Jesus responds, "Naw, they can stay; YOU feed 'em."

"What? Come on, Lord, we have nothing here but five loaves and two fish. That's not gonna feed ALL these people!"

"We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish."

"Nothing here but five loaves and two fish."

And that my friends, is the response of the ages when people feel overwhelmed by the world around them.



It is the response of the parent worried about her child. The child has so many peers who exert so much pressure and is with those peers at school and at play far more than he/she is with the parent. So many influences ... so many temptations to face. Parents hungry for answers ask "What are we to do? We have Nothing Here But Five Loaves And Two Fish."



It is the response of the small business owner in the face of a struggling economy. How can he compete with the big chain store that has just opened, one that advertises "Twenty Thousand Items Under One Roof"? He is hungry for answers about how he can keep the little family-owned store open? After all, he doesn't have 20,000 ANYTHING; he has "Nothing Here But Five Loaves And Two Fish."



It is the response of the employee whose boss makes life miserable and never has a good word for anyone. In fact, there are things going on around the office that just ought not to be. "Business ethics" has become an oxymoron. Should you blow the whistle? Feel free ... if you don't want the job anymore. Does the word "downsize" strike a familiar note? What then? Good jobs are scarce out there ... the bills keep coming in and you still have to pay for the kids' college. A worker hungry for the chance to do the right thing says, "Nothing Here But Five Loaves And Two Fish."



It is the response of the spouse who is desperately trying to make a go of a troubled marriage, and who's getting really tired of being the only one working at the relationship. No, it is not as bad as Arnold and Maria. He is still around ... some. But not enough. And when he IS there, his mind is somewhere else. Hungry for a rekindling of the passion, she is left with saying sadly, "There's Nothing Here But Five Loaves And Two Fish."



It is the response of the young adult who finds life on campus so demanding that he or she no longer knows how to cope.

I was intrigued by a letter to Ann Landers from an adolescent in response to one sent by someone who lived through the Depression and had described how hard it was to be a teenager in the 1930's. The message was that kids today have an easy time of it compared to teens in his day. Listen to the young respondent:

"Let me ask your generation a few questions: Are your parents divorced? Almost every one of my friends comes from a broken home.

Were you thinking about suicide when you were 12?

Did you have an ulcer when you were 16?

Did your best friend lose her virginity to a guy she went out with twice?

You may have had to worry about VD, but did you have to worry about AIDS?

Did your classmates carry guns and knives?

How many kids in your class came to school regularly drunk, stoned, or high on drugs?

Did any of your friends have their brains fried from using METH?

What percentage of your graduating class also graduated from a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center?

Did your school have armed security guards in the halls?

Did you ever live in a neighborhood where the sound of gunfire at night was "normal"?

You talk a lot about being dirt poor and having no money. Since when does money mean happiness? The kids at school who have the expensive cars and designer clothes are the most miserable.

When I am your age, I won't do much looking back ... I'll just thank God that I survived.

Hmm. What is a teenager to do these days? "Lord, we have nothing here but Five Loaves and Two Fish." Maybe not even that!

Our dinner might be the one the Psalmist complained of: "my tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, 'Where is your God?'" (Psalm 42:3). It might be the response any of us offer when life seems overwhelming and we just KNOW our resources are not enough to deal with it. ""Nothing Here But Five Loaves And Two Fish." What are we to do?



Certainly that was the response of the disciples when five thousand men (plus women and children) followed Jesus into the wilderness. Did you catch that in verse 21? "Five thousand-plus!" They had come to listen to Christ's words, to feel his healing touch, to be near something ... someone ... special. And now the story says the hour had grown late, it was time for supper, and they were hungry. There was no way to buy food for that crowd. It would have taken two hundred denarii or the equivalent of six month's pay or eight month's pay (depending upon which commentator you believe). At any rate ... it was a bundle! Definitely more cash than any of the disciples ever had. It really didn't matter anyway ... the Food Lions and the Winn-Judeas were closed, and there weren't any McDonald's or Taco Bell's in Bethsaida. So Jesus said to the Twelve: "You give them something to eat."

Hmm. Jesus always seems to be asking more of us than we have to give ... as spouses and parents and students and workers and on and on. He calls us to love, even when loving is difficult; to forgive, even when we have been wronged; to stand fast and firm on our principles, even when it means standing alone. And those things aren't easy to do. After all, we are not Jesus! "We have Nothing Here But Five Loaves And Two Fish."



Fortunately for the Twelve ... and for us ... the story does not end with Jesus asking the seemingly impossible of the disciples, then wandering off into the desert leaving them stranded. "You give them something to eat," he said. And the disciples answered, "How? We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." Then Jesus said softly: 'Bring them here to me.' ...He looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. All ate and were filled..." And there were twelve baskets of food left over.

This is Good News for you Moms and Dads who find yourselves wondering, "Do I have what it takes to handle these kids today ... not to be a GOOD parent, but just one that's adequate?" The answer is no, we don't have what it takes. At best, in the face of overwhelming odds, "We have nothing here but Five Loaves and Two Fish." But we have a friend who whispers "Bring them to me." "Bring them to me ... your skills and weaknesses as parents, your strengths and fears, your children and their futures. Bring them to me, and I will help you be suitable for the task at hand."

This is Good News for SPOUSES in troubled marriages faced with tough decisions, and for STUDENTS who always feel as though they are swimming up stream, and for PEOPLE OF CONSCIENCE who feel called to take a risky stance on some issue. What is one person, anyway? When accompanied by Jesus, one person can be a majority. Christ says to all: "Bring them to me" ... your hopes, your dreams, your convictions. "Bring them to me" ... your burdens, your challenges, your responsibilities. For he who took a meager lunch bag from a little boy and fed the multitude near Bethsaida can do it again ... even with the meager resources in OUR lunch bags.

★ When life gets the best of us, maybe it's because we focus too much on how little we can do ... and too little on how much Christ can do.



In Virginia, a small church was hosting a bake sale and crafts fair to raise money for missions. The best cooks presented their pies, jams, and cakes. Men offered exquisite wood workings. But Ellen, old and arthritic, took old clothing and cut the cloth to sew it into a patchwork quilt of red, turquoise, and yellow. It didn't sell ... its bright colors so garish. So at the end of the day the money and the leftover things that didn't sell were boxed up and shipped to Africa to the waiting missionary. He opened the box of items and money, and thanked God for the much needed money and other things. That odd colored quilt? He set it aside, draping it over a tree limb.

That's when the tribal chief ... who'd been particularly difficult to deal with ... came by and admired the quilt. He draped it over his shoulders like a cape and beamed at the effect. "What will you take for this?" he asked the missionary. "A piece of land so that I can build a church," the missionary bargained. And the deal was made.

An 86-year-old widow with arthritic hands offers Jesus her lunch ... in the form of an out-of-fashion quilt. A missionary, not sure what to do with the offering, hangs it over a tree limb. I have nothing here but Five Loaves and Two Fish!" But Jesus whispers: Bring it to me...



Think about your own life right now. What are you struggling with? What in your life are you unsure about? Where do you need God's help? Our response is often the same as the disciples: "What are we supposed to do, Lord? We have nothing here but Five Loaves and Two Fish!"

Listen again to the Psalmist sing:

"Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my help and my God." (42:5-6a)

What I have, what the Psalmist had, what you have, what anyone hungry for help has ... is the invitation to call on Someone who knows what to do.

When life seems too big and I feel too small, Someone is close who can do what I cannot ...  
Someone who can right the wrongs and heal the hurts and love the unlovely and scale the mountains ...  
Someone who can take my paltry little handful of loaves and fish and turn them into a feast.

*However little I may possess in terms of talent or resources, Jesus whispers: "Bring them to me..." and with him, my little becomes A LOT.*

Amen and Amen.