

The Miracle of a Meal

John 6:1-14
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First Presbyterian Church
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The following conversation was overheard in a Galilean peasant's home, about 2,000 years ago: "If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times – don't be so trusting! Just because someone asks you for something, you don't have to give it away. You can keep it. It's yours! "Imagine – giving away your lunch! And after I packed it so carefully for you – the flat loaves of bread still warm from the oven, the savory smoked fish. Your father and I gave you that food so you could eat. We can't feed all those other people! "What happened, anyway, when you gave your lunch away? Tell me. That disciple of Jesus who asked you for it – did he eat it? Or did he give it to someone else?" "No?" said the boy. "That's not the way it was?" "So, how was it? "What happened on that hillside with Jesus?"

That's the question for us today. What happened when Jesus was followed by a large crowd, and they became hungry, and one of his disciples tried to feed their need?

We look at the Feeding of the Five Thousand and see it as a miracle that proves Jesus is the Son of God. And that's a correct interpretation of scripture. But there's more there, just beneath the surface. There's more there than just feeding hungry people, and there's more than believing that Jesus did miracles.

Our world today is full of hungry people, and full of people who need Jesus in their lives. Our country is full of people who need more Jesus; we need more people following what Jesus teaches. Our church needs more Jesus, more miracles that will draw people alongside us for spiritual growth, worship and praise, care and compassion, and outreach with unconditional love and acceptance.

That's what we can learn from the Feeding of the Five Thousand. We can learn how to bring more people into our church, how to feed them in their need, and how to inspire them to join us in building up the Kingdom of God.

This Wednesday, we are having an all-church meal for the start of LOGOS, which is now being called Wednesday Night Live, to signify the broader, more inclusive program that it is. There are two new classes being offered, both of

them for adults, which we've not had before. One of them is on the power of prayer, the power of prayer to energize our faith and build up the church. The other is on the Book of Acts, so there's something for everyone. The adult classes are every other week, so there's only five or six sessions between now and December. Not a huge commitment.

Now wouldn't it be a miracle if, over the course of this next program year, we filled Westminster Hall with people from this church along with your family and friends, neighbors and coworkers?!? Yes, it would. It would be the miracle of gathering at church with friends and family for an adult meal cooked by the likes of Dora Dunaway, the miracle of attending a class together that deepens our faith and our friendships, and the miracle of watching those seeds of faith blossom in our lives, the lives of our family and friends, and the life of our church. Are you up for that miracle? Can I get an, "Amen!"

That's great. We can all commit right now to seeing that miracle happen. To help us do that, let's look at Jesus' miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand and see how it can teach us, inspire us and equip us to bring about the miracle of the Meal at Wednesday Night Live, feeding both body and soul, both ours and others'.

When we see Jesus being followed by a large crowd, them becoming hungry, and one of his disciples trying to feed their need, we see a clear pathway, clear steps that we can take to bring about the miracle of the Meal at Wednesday Night Live.

The first thing John tells us is that Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee and a large crowd followed him, because they saw the signs that he was doing. So first, Jesus went someplace new, and people saw it and followed.

That's not hard to imagine, and it's not hard to do. If we want to bring people into this church, then we need to be willing to go someplace new, and we need let people know about it. Our new Wednesday Night Live ministry can be that new place for you, for our church. And, of course, I know not everybody can come out on Wednesday, but there are other things at church that feed you spiritually, other places that are fertile ground for growth, both yours and that of others.

The reason people followed Jesus is because they saw the miracles he was doing, the miracles God was doing through him.

For people to be drawn together at First Church, they have to see the miracles that are happening here. Just like the hungry masses on the hillside with Jesus, there are people you know who are hungry, hungry for spiritual growth, hungry for worship and praise, hungry for care and compassion, hungry for a church that reaches out with unconditional love and acceptance.

Don't you want to meet those people in their need? Don't you want to point them to something that will feed them body and soul, a good meal and Christian fellowship and learning?

You know, that reminds me of the guy who called his friend to remind him about a church potluck saying "Ok, "My wife and I will bring the cheese, and you and your wife need to bring the bread." His friend said, "Wait a minute. You know I always mess these things up. You better call my wife and tell her whose bringing what." "No, it's easy," says his friend. "Just tell her, 'Cheese, us; loaves, you.'"

Stupid, I know. But it's also a great way to tell folks about Wednesday Night Live, or any of the other programs we have here at church. Tell them that joke, blame it on me, and then invite them to come, and pick them up and bring them if you can. Now that would be a miracle, wouldn't it – seeing all our friends and family at Westminster Hall on Wednesday, and then maybe even more of our members and friends here at worship on Sunday?

Well, for that to happen, we have to let others know about what's happening at church, whether that's Wednesday Night Live, our other weekday gatherings and small groups, Sunday worship, or a special event. There are a lot of people who are missing out on being at church these days. You can look around and see that. Why not call and check in on them? Why not encourage them to be with us just as soon they're comfortable and able? Why not work that miracle in their lives, in the life of this church, and in your life, too?

Jesus – in working the miracle for the people who hungered for what he had to offer – "took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted." And not only that, but John tells us that after the meal they gathered up the fragments into 12 baskets full of bread.

The Miracle of the Five Thousand is about people being hungry for the blessings of God that Jesus lifted up and thanked God for – using as an example five barley loaves and two fish – blessings that God multiplied right before their eyes.

In that simple act of lifting up blessings and thanking God in the presence of others, five thousand people were fed, body and soul. Will we have five thousand at Westminster Hall on Wednesday night? No. But if we – if you and I – spend some time this week lifting up the blessings of First Church in the presence of others, we will have people arrive there or here at worship hungry for Jesus, people ready to be fed body and soul, by who we are as a church.

And all it takes for God to work that miracle through us is a commitment right now that we will gather as a community of faith, that we will lift up the blessings of this church for others to see and hear about, and that we will thank God for the miracles that he does for us and through us. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Loving God, we give you thanks and praise that, through Jesus, you healed the sick and fed the hungry. With a few paltry fish and loaves of bread, you fed a crowd of hungry people, and with grace to spare.

We, too, long to be fed. We, too, clamor for your healing touch.

We come to you in prayer now, pressing in on you from all sides, with our needs and desires – some trivial, some profound – and through it all, you love us. You are attentive to the deepest yearnings and the most hidden wounds of our hearts. Attend to us, once again, we pray.

We lift up in prayer those who are sick and in need of your healing. We pray for the discouraged, the depressed and those in grief. Comfort them, heal them and feed them the bread of life, sufficient for the journey.

We pray for the vitality of our church, the spiritual growth of our members and friends, and the building up of your kingdom, O God.

Surely it was through your providence that – in the miraculous feeding of the thousands – there were 12 baskets of leftovers ... one for each disciple to take and share with others.

In the same way, equip us as your disciples today. Give us the gifts of your grace that we need to be a healing and spiritually nursing presence for others. Multiply our efforts beyond our imagining.

You have done so before; we pray you would do so again, here and now, among us, your faithful followers, who pray together now using the words that you taught us, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive
our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**