

Some of you are going to doubt this story – the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000. Two weeks ago Zach helped me with an illustration about faith and doubt. I held a \$10 bill in my hand, hidden. Zach “saw” the \$10 when I opened my hand; thus an issue of faith became a reality. Once Zach saw it, he no longer needed faith. But each time we are confronted with something requiring faith, we have the same decision to make – will we believe? Or, will we doubt? Let me show you what I mean.

Zach, could you please help me out again. Do you believe I have a \$10 bill in my hand? As you look at my clinched hands, are you anxious? Do you know for sure there’s a \$10 bill hidden in there? Of course you don’t. Each new experience of faith requires faith once again. But hopefully because you have experience, hope will overcome fear. Will it? What do you think? Do you have faith or doubt?

Now the disciples had seen Jesus heal many times. He cast out demons in their presence. He raised the dead. He calmed the seas. They themselves had just returned from a successful mission of preaching and healing people. And yet with this story, it was as if they had no recollection of Jesus’ power. Faithless people! Before I do any name-calling though, perhaps we should take a look for ourselves, and consider our own faith. How would we do with that kind of challenge? Listen to one of the most famous miracles in the Bible. READ Luke 9:10-17

What a wonderful miracle; vivid; organized; not showy – it just sort of happened. Do you believe it? You read Mark’s version this week, in which it says even though the disciples had seen the miracle and been a part of it, their hearts were hard and they missed it. Yet it is a profound miracle and if we can open our hearts to explore it this morning, we may learn something about our incredible God.

If our eyes are opened to God’s work, then when circumstances confront us where faith is required we might choose hope rather than doubt and despair.

Before this event, the disciples hadn’t done that much ministry. They observed Jesus; they listened and talked and asked questions of Jesus. They lived with him; watching His rhythm of prayer and ministry; of being with people and withdrawing to spend time alone with God. So now they found themselves taking some leadership. Evening drew near. They were probably hungry themselves. They wanted the crowd to go find food and lodging so, taking their first steps of authority, they told Jesus to send the people away.

But Jesus responded – Instead of doing that, why don’t you feed them; you care for their needs.

They were incredulous.

It would be like Jesus saying to us, First Presbyterian Church Duncanville – take care of the hunger needs in Duncanville. We would say, are you kidding? Let them take care of themselves. We don’t even know their needs.

Perhaps they thought is this what it’s going to be like to be a disciple, a serious Christian? This doesn’t sound like much fun. I don’t want to do that!

Now, my mother would probably think she could do it. She loves to cook; she always cooks way too much food; and she even supervises your eating. She would delight in this story.

I, on the other hand, am like the disciples – send them away; they can take care of themselves; let's make it easy on ourselves. Jesus is like my mother. He looked at the crowd and insisted. He wanted to provide dinner for them. God is like a good mother. God wants to feed His children. God's Son reflects that very thing – Jesus wasn't about to send them away hungry. But how in the world would he accomplish it with people like me?

Jesus was concerned for the crowds but something else is going on here, and as disciples of Jesus, we need to take note. Jesus hovers. He sticks with us, whatever our shortcomings and lack of faith. He guides us. He takes the lead. He asked the disciples to bring him all their resources, even though those resources really didn't amount to much.

Jesus is this way with each of us, including First Presbyterian Church. He expresses interest in the needs of those around us; He says, "You do something about it." We panic. *Who, us? We're not able to do anything.* He says, "Bring me what you have. Let's see what we can do."

I've been working with Young Life at Duncanville High School on Thursday afternoons, teaching teenage girls the Bible. The first week I had two. The second week I had 0. (See, God, I have nothing to offer.) The third week there were six, then nine, and last Thursday there were 13 girls. They are all a different culture from me, and, considerably younger. What if it keeps growing? What if I invite them here? Can we handle it? Are we willing?

Jesus said, bring your resources to me and let's see what we can do.

The resources of the disciples were slim, even laughable. Nevertheless, they obeyed and brought them to Jesus. When we bring our resources, however small we might think they are, when we place them in His hands, then we begin to see Jesus for who He is. He's an amazing, miracle worker.

Jesus took what they had and he prayed over it. I think His prayer was like this: "Heavenly Father, I praise you for the faith of my beloved disciples. Give us now the daily provision that you have always and will forever provide."

Now think about the children of Israel in the desert with nothing to eat – and complaining (Ex 16:11-29, 32, 35). God heard, and in a very detailed way, provided just enough day after day, and then every sixth day, God provided double as a gift, as we read earlier. Did you hear that? The Sabbath was a gift of rest from God. Forty years, day in and day out, God provided. And so we pray each day,

"Give us this day, God, our daily bread." Jesus taught the disciples this prayer. I wonder if they thought of this miracle whenever they prayed it.

We think that when we ask for our provision of bread from God, it would be enough for one day. But, Jesus provided more than enough, with twelve baskets left over. What does that tell us about God?

I checked out that word. What does our daily bread mean? Scholars have wrestled with it because it's used nowhere else, not even among secular Greeks, so it has special significance for how God sees things. It refers to time – “today” but it also means, “Give us our bread of tomorrow,” because we know it's coming. We look forward to the great Messianic banquet that Jesus will give for all believers at the end of history. And, we celebrate the Lord's Supper in the meantime.

Others said, this word doesn't have to do with time, it has to do with the amount of bread. So, then, how much bread do we pray for when we pray, “Give us this day, our daily bread?” Do we pray for just enough to keep us alive, or for the bread that doesn't run out? Scholars believe it means both.<sup>1</sup> Remember what God said to Moses, “Tell them, ‘in the morning you will have all the bread you want.’”

So Jesus lifted his hands to heaven that day to pray. He probably said something like this. “Deliver your children from the fear of not having enough to eat. Give us bread for today and with it give us confidence that tomorrow You will provide enough.”

Then the disciples' baskets were miraculously filled with more than enough. Small groups of people were everywhere. They could talk, fellowship, and enjoy the food together. What a spirit of fun. Imagine being there; the food coming around and there's more and more, because our God is a generous God.

This past week I had a similar experience. It seems that in the PC(USA), 50% of new pastors quit after the first three years of ministry. So a family who owned Lilly Pharmaceuticals set aside some money for support of new pastors. New pastors retreat together periodically the first four years of ministry to spend time with experienced mentors. Our trip was paid for, we were fed abundantly, and how generous it felt to be cared for. How gracious God is.

Jehovah Jirah, God provides. God provides for the crowd, and provides for the disciples and provides for us. Let's watch this clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgU8re8b8aA>

Do you believe Jesus fed the 5,000? Or are you like the disciples who were slow to believe because their hearts were hard? When you believe, you will see the miracle.

The greatest blessing of all is that we get to touch Jesus' heart and hands as he lays the provision in our hands to distribute. What a blessing that He calls you and me. Will you believe that God will provide today and that God will use you?

AMEN

---

<sup>1</sup>Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, p. 119ff.