**Ways and Means**

Based on [John 6:1-15](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn6.1-15)

Preached on

Fourth Sunday in Lent - Laetare

Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

In today’s Gospel, Jesus feeds more than five thousand people with only five loaves of bread and two fish. The reason there was such a large crowd following him is because they had seen his healing signs. So Jesus went up on the mountain and sat down with his disciples. And Jesus asked one of them, Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?”

Jesus already knew what he was going to do. He was going to feed them all. **But he asked Philip this question to test him. And it is a loaded question, because it assumes something in the asking.**  The classic example of a loaded question is, “when did you stop beating your wife?”…presumes you beat your wife. Jesus asks, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” That presumes that it is their responsibility to provide bread.

And it is Jesus’ responsibility to feed them. Jesus is the messiah and he is responsible for his sheep, and he assumes that responsibility without hesitation. T**heir hunger is his hunger, because their problems are his problems, because he is their Saviour and their God.** He is their God, from whom they are to expect all good things. // If a child is hungry, it is the parent’s responsibility to feed him…and cloth him and give him shelter for that matter. Jesus assumes responsibility for those who follow him, and he will not send them away without giving them what they need.

So Jesus asks Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little. **And Andrew finds a boy with five loaves and two fish but also says, “what are they for so many?”**  The short answer that both of these disciples give is this: Jesus, even if it is our responsibility to feed the crowd, it just isn’t practical for us to do so. Even if we wanted to help, we couldn’t, we just don’t have the means.”

But this is not true. They can do something, and they have the means. Jesus Christ is the way--the ways and means as it were--to the Father, the giver of all good gifts. **This seems to be a particular stumbling block for Philip, which is apparently why Jesus asks him where they are to buy bread.** Later on, Jesus says to his disciples, “I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” And it is Philip who said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”

Philip is remembered as the disciple who has trouble grasping the fact that Jesus is the way to the Father; that when they have Jesus with them they have God the Father with them, and all He is and all he does is available to them. **They have Jesus, and they behave as if they have nothing.**  They have everything. They have the author of life there with them, and more than that, he is telling them to feed the five thousand. But the disciples prove very dull once again, and just don’t understand.

It was the same with respect to the Israelites in the wilderness. They had all seen with their own eyes God part the Red Sea to deliver them from the hands of the Egyptians. T**hey saw the Lord get glory over Pharaoh and his chariots by crushing them in the sea.** And within three days they begin to grumble that Moses led them into the wilderness to die of thirst. Within a month, they say he led them away to die of hunger.

They had witnessed signs and wonders that which the world had never known, done by the Lord on their behalf. The Lord was showing his jealous love for Israel and they so quickly forget that the one who created the heavens and the earth is with them and fights for them, and they grumble and believe they are without help.

The disciples had already witnessed Jesus’ signs. **His turning of water into wine for a wedding at Cana, his healing of the lame man at a pool in Bethesda, but they still neglect the resource they have.**  “If God is for us who can be against us.” If the Creator of heaven and earth is for you, how can anything worry you? The central teaching here is that faith does not doubt, but remembers that Jesus is God with us; and with God nothing is impractical or impossible for those who believe.

Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. Jesus then 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 when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “**Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.” So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten.**”

Several things to learn here. First is, to put it crudely, Jesus is not stingy. It may have been that the disciples were thinking that five loaves and two bread would barely feed all twelve of them. **If they were to give that away, they would go away hungry…along with the crowds because there wouldn’t even be enough crumbs to go around.** But Jesus is not stingy; and God always provides an abundance of the fruits of the earth. So it is that, even after thousands had eaten of the loaves and the fish, there were twelve basketfuls left over, one basket for each disciple who doubted there would be enough to eat. Jesus teaches that in their providing for others, he does not neglect those who minister on his behalf.

Also, Jesus gives an example of how to feed a congregation of people. There can be little doubt that Jesus is here foreshadowing what’s to come when he institutes the Lord’s Supper. First, John mentions that this happens during the Passover, which is the context in which the Supper is instituted the following year. Further to that, e**ven the words, “Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks” are the same as those used in the Lord’s supper.** They are where we get the word Eucharist, sometimes used to indicate Communion. And it is in the context of this feeding that Jesus later teaches, “I am the bread of life”, and “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day”.

The feeding of the five thousand was a miracle and sign Jesus did for his people on a hill in Galilee. The Lord’s Supper is a miracle and sign Jesus continues to do for his people in church today. **We come to him, seeking this sign, and he assembles us, blesses bread and wine multiplying his body and blood, once given and shed on the cross, for us Christians to eat and to drink until the end of the age.** In it, we remember that Jesus is with us, and nourishes us with what we truly need. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Be satisfied that in this holy meal, your sins--however great or small--are forgiven and that on the last day he will raise you up to celebrate the marriage feast of the Lam in His Kingdom, which has no end.

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