



I remember when I first started to, actually, pay attention to the details of the stories in the Bible, when it came to this Gospel passage, I was more transfixed with exactly how Jesus pulled all this off. And if the 5,000 number was only the *men* present for that rather massive meal, how many people did Jesus, really, miraculously serve when you add in the women and children as well? Or, how about at the beginning of the whole story; that even Jesus, Lord, Messiah, God incarnate, even *he* needs a break from the relentless need with the pain and anguish surrounding him. And yet, still to this day, I remember the pastor railing on another verse I completely overlooked: as the disciples are trying to give themselves a break from the relentless need of the massively hungry crowd, Jesus responds: “*you* give them something to eat.”

Now, maybe I looked over that verse, because at that point in my life, when it came to those late Sunday mornings, I was primarily concerned with what *I* was about to eat soon enough. Because, for the longest time, I will admit to you that the only reason why I showed up to a church building on the Sabbath day was the delicious McDonald’s lunch coming to me afterwards. Chicken McNuggets and Super-Sized Fries with sweet and sour sauce had a way of reeling my younger self in Sunday after Sunday. It had a way of starting the entire week off on a most exquisite note. Now, it’s not that I wanted to pass off the verse entirely: “*you* give them something to eat.” It’s just...other people in the congregation could take care of that plea from the Messiah, and not self-centered teenage me. Many of those pew-occupiers were farmers, oddly enough. They certainly did their part to fulfill the cry of the Lord and Savior, so I didn’t have to worry about it so much.

Nevertheless, part of the reason we made the trek to the Golden Arch at the end of town after worship on Sundays, was to get food for my farming father as well (although he has always been more of a Wendy’s guy than McDonald’s). To this day, he continues to farm about 1100 acres’ worth of corn and soybeans, the equivalent of 835 or so football fields. Although he, and many farmers around the world, most certainly do their part in proudly answering the call of “*you* give them something to eat,” we know, still, far too many people in this world go to bed hungry. Suffice it to say, the global supply chain of food remains in turmoil, and is feared only to get worse because of the coronavirus, with less and less people having the means to access the nourishment they desperately need. The cry remains just as strong to the present-day disciples: “*you* give them something to eat.”

And yet, just like with my father: one person, one family, one congregation, is not equipped to feed all the hungry in their immediate surrounding area, let alone solving the entire world-wide dilemma. However, as the Gospel story so goes, one of the details we cannot take for granted is that the disciples do, in fact, give their portion of what they have for the thousands to eat. And then, leave to it Jesus to take it to another holy level his followers could not even realize was possible.

Thankfully, for many years now, we are part of a wider church that pools its resources, pulls in the various responses of our siblings in Christ to “*you* give them something to eat,” and through the work of ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response, our equivalents of five loaves and two fish are taken to a miraculous level, even during these days when the struggle is at a crisis toll for far too many families near and far away.

So, take for example, Hope Lutheran Church in Reading, Pennsylvania, just northwest of Philadelphia. Pastor Mary Wolfe has been serving there thirteen years, where she says the building “sit[s] on a corner of a couple bus routes and the houses are tightly packed together...[M]any of the church’s neighbors experience poverty and unemployment. While they struggle even through the

best of times, the circumstances surrounding the crisis of COVID-19 have made their typical challenges severely overwhelming.” Pastor Mary said, “It is vital that we not only remain on the ground offering assurance...but that we step up our efforts to provide the assistance our neighbors need...[Since the pandemic started, their] food pantry went from serving an average of 200 families twice each month, to serving 350 families,” with their expenses doubling.

Thankfully, still enough present-day disciples continue to give a few loaves and some fish worth of support, enough for Lutheran Disaster Response to donate \$30,000 to Eastern Pennsylvania, including to the ministry provided by Hope Lutheran Church. They “began preparing meals for take-out and delivery and set up the food pantry in [their] parking lot,” teaming up with other congregations, local businesses and restaurants. It seems that a few loaves and some fish in whatever form they come from us, start to add up after a while to an impact of holy proportion. Pastor Mary said, “This grant has given us the encouragement that allows us to believe that if you are participating in God’s work in the world, then the means to continue to do that work will be provided.” Evidently, “you give them something to eat,” Jesus says, “and I will take it to another level you didn’t realize was possible.”

So, whether it’s support to Lutheran Disaster Response or ELCA World Hunger or local food pantries or homeless shelters, or complete strangers along our day-to-day living, we do our part in the loaves and the fish adding up to respond to a still-hungry world. But, lest we forget, on these Sabbath days of worship, Jesus invites us to the sacred moment when *he* gives *us* something to eat: a precious something of his own body and blood to nourish our soul, to never lose hope even in the face of a pandemic, to give us the strength we need in proudly living as his present-day disciples for the sake of the world. For us to do our humble parts, for Jesus to take it all to another holy level that we never saw coming. And for that Great News, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!

*Quotes from Liberty Lutheran (May 20, 2020) “Serving Food and Hope to Neighbors in Need: LDR Grant Helps Feeding Ministry in Eastern PA Support Their Community Through COVID-19”*  
<https://blog.libertylutheran.org/2020/05/serving-food-and-hope-to-neighbors-in-need-ldr-grant-helps-feeding-ministry-in-eastern-pa-support-their-community-through-covid-19/>