

The Feeding of the Five Thousand

The feeding of the five thousand is one of the most famous of Jesus's many miracles. In fact, it is the only one recorded in all four gospels. It sets off a fascinating exchange between Jesus and the crowd on what it means that Jesus is the bread of life.

One of the first things that we learn in this story is that Jesus is going to feed this crowd *even though* they are actually following him for the wrong reasons. This chapter begins with a large crowd following Jesus, "*because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick.*" Not because they want to learn from Jesus, or because they have come to believe that he is God's promised Messiah, but simply because they want to see more miracles.

But Jesus doesn't seem to mind why they are there. He sees an opportunity to care for them anyway, and then to teach them about the coming kingdom. And he also sees an opportunity to teach his twelve apostles an economics lesson, too. The simple but radical lesson, that with Jesus, there is always enough.

He begins by asking one of the twelve, Philip, "*Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?*" He said this to test them, for he knew what he was about to do. The disciples hear this question through the lens of scarcity and are quite sure they cannot do anything about this problem. It would take six months wages to buy enough bread for five thousand people, and even if they had the money, who has that much bread to sell?

One of the twelve chimes in, “*There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?*” Not enough. Not nearly enough. Five loaves of bread and two fish are not going to feed the thousands of people that are there with Jesus.

It doesn’t take an economist to figure out that they don’t have enough to feed this crowd. But the problem is that these disciples are looking at this situation as economists, not as followers of Jesus. They are convinced that they don’t have enough, because they are focused on what they *don’t* have. And they are forgetting what they *do* have. What they *do* have is Jesus.

Jesus has been performing all of these miracles, And his disciples have been witnessing these amazing displays of his power. So, why wouldn’t Jesus be able to feed this crowd? The disciples don’t believe that Jesus can. Why? Because when you look at the world through the lens of scarcity, there is never enough of anything. It is almost as if these disciples are looking at Jesus as a scarce resource, only able to do so much. And they want to make sure that they use this resource carefully. But Jesus is not a scarce resource! With Jesus, there is always enough!

Jesus doesn’t play by the rules of economics. And so, in this great story, Jesus teaches us a different way of looking at the world, his way. Through the lens of *abundance*, not of *scarcity*. And looking at the world this way changes how you live in the world. When we see the world through the lens of abundance, not scarcity, amazing things can happen.

Do We Have Enough?

It's difficult to look at the world through the lens of abundance, isn't it? Everything around us teaches us that it's not true. Even when we have enough, we are taught, in many and various ways, that we need more.

The truth is that we have enough. We have enough food to eat, enough clothes, shelter, and on and on. But very few of us, if we are being honest, really feel as though we have enough. And that is true for most people in our society. And this can create a restlessness, and a feeling of discontent, that can be hard to shake.

Now, of course there are also many people in our country, and in our world that are hungry, that are homeless, and that clearly do not have enough.

And there are some who wonder whether there isn't a connection between the two. A connection between the feeling that we don't have enough, because we are taught to look at the world through the lens of scarcity, and the reality that there are many in our world that actually do not have enough.

Not to pick on any billionaire space travelers ;), but it has been pointed out that if those same billionaires were to put their resources toward feeding the hungry of the world, they could virtually wipe out the problem of world hunger. So, why don't they? Perhaps because even they don't believe that they have enough. Or perhaps because they are looking to the next great thing to feed their insatiable hunger; and for them, the next great thing is traveling to space. When will they have enough wealth? When will they have enough life-adventures? Our world teaches us that the answer is never. Even they will never have enough.

As long as we look at the world through the lens of scarcity, we will never have enough. And as long as we seek to feed our spiritual hunger with the things of this world, we will never find that hunger fulfilled. Today's gospel reading, and the ones that follow, are intended to teach us both of these fundamental truths.

That with Jesus, there is always enough.

And without Jesus, there is never enough.

Giving Thanks

By the way, did you notice that in today's gospel reading, the first thing that Jesus does with the five loaves of bread is to give thanks? He is not worried about what he doesn't have. He is thankful for what he does. And after giving thanks, he distributed the bread to the five thousand; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. They all ate their fill. And then, he began to teach them what it all means.

It is perhaps enough to simply remember that with Jesus, there is always enough. We may not feel as though we have enough. Enough wealth. Or enough time. Or even enough faith. Or enough hope. Sometimes, it may seem like all we have is a couple of loaves of bread, a few fish, and thousands to feed. What can we accomplish with that?

But this gospel miracle is there to remind us that what we have is much more than five loaves and two fish. What we have is Jesus. And Jesus is always enough. Jesus is always willing to take whatever meager gifts we are willing to share, and bless them, and us, as we share them with the world. And Jesus makes sure that it is always enough.

Closing

I guess you could call this “gospel economics.” With Jesus, there is always enough. Without Jesus, there is never enough. With Jesus, five loaves of bread and two fish is more than enough to feed five thousand. And, in fact, just to emphasize his point, Jesus made sure that there was actually *more* than enough. Twelve baskets of leftovers. We clearly worship a God of abundance, not scarcity. This is the miracle of the gospel. This is the joy at the heart of our faith. And it is the reason I am a pastor, and no longer an economist. To keep proclaiming, in many and various ways, that with Jesus there is always enough. Enough love. Enough hope. Enough grace. Enough faith. And enough time, talent, and treasure, too. Enough of all that matters, and all that our world hungers for.

So come to Jesus, wherever you are today, and be fed with the living bread from heaven, which alone can feed your hungry souls. And then go, in the name of Jesus, to feed the hungry of our world with the bread of life. Share what you have – your faith, hope, and love, and your time, talent, and treasure. And never doubt that with Jesus, what we have, and what we give, will always be more than enough. Thanks be to God.

Amen