

In the right hands, something ordinary can be something quite extraordinary. If you put a bow and arrow in my hands, I suggest you stand behind an impenetrable object for protection. But in the hands of an Olympic archer and bulls eye after bulls eye is hit.

Put a basketball in my hands and watch me play a game, and you'll soon be yawning. Put a basketball in the hands of LeBron James, and you'll sit on the edge of your seat looking forward to every time he touches the ball.

Put a paintbrush in my hands, and you'll wonder what kindergartener slopped something down on paper. Put a paintbrush in the hands of Rembrandt and you get a multi-million dollar work of art.

Put a scalpel in my hand ... well, never mind. Just... don't. Put a scalpel in the hands of a skilled surgeon and it is an instrument of healing.

Today we're going to learn what happens when you put something very ordinary and apparently inadequate in the hands of Jesus. We'll see what happens when you take a situation that is hopeless and with woefully insufficient resources to take care of it, and place it into Jesus' hands.

It's my prayer today, that the Holy Spirit will convince you to truly take your problems, your troubles, your life... and place them in Jesus' hands.

The story from Scriptures that will teach us this today comes from John 6:1-15. It is the story about the feeding of the 5,000. You're probably aware that the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, have a considerable amount of overlap and many similarities. So it may surprise you that this story about the feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle account (aside from the resurrection) that is included in all four Gospels. There is something very important about this story that the Holy Spirit really wants us to grasp! Let's take a look:

**Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick.**

Jesus was very popular and had a big following. But why? Because they saw the miracles he was performing.

**Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples.**

Why a mountain? It was easier to see. It was a natural pulpit for his voice to carry out over a large crowd.

**The Jewish Passover Feast was near. When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"**

Let's pause quick and clarify. John compresses the story at this point. He wants to get right to the miracle. The other Gospels indicate that Jesus first preached to them and taught them all day long. They spent the day being fed by the Word, but in the evening they need food for their bodies as well.

So Jesus **said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"**

**He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.**

Jesus doesn't just do the miracle, but he uses this as an opportunity to teach something to his disciples. This test was not so Jesus could learn something about them. The test was for the disciples to know themselves better and their weaknesses, and also to know Jesus better and his strength and love. Through this, their faith would be strengthened.

Why ask Philip? He was from this area. He probably knew many of the people. He would also naturally know where to go to obtain so much food. But Philip was also with Jesus from the beginning.

What was the right answer? "Lord, I don't know where we'll get enough bread for all these people. But I trust that you will provide." They had seen his miracles. Philip had been with Jesus from the beginning. He had seen Jesus turn water into wine. They knew his love and mercy.

But Philip answered differently.

**Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"**

This is significant. Philip gets something right and something wrong. He's right that they don't have the resources to feed this crowd. In our money, they would have needed more than \$30,000 to feed a crowd like this. He's wrong in that he doesn't consider this a dilemma that Jesus can solve.

**Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"**

Apparently a boy overheard the discussion and offered to help by bringing 5 loaves and 2 small fish. A childlike faith is one that believes this small amount of food will be of use to 10,000 people! A childlike faith offers food to the Lord that could have been used for self. Andrew did not share the faith of this boy.

By the way, it's probably worth commenting here briefly the post-modern view of this miracle. Like all the other miracles of Jesus, it is denied that any miracle took place here, because we all are mature adults who know that miracles don't happen. What actually happened is that the crowd saw the boy ready to share his lunch, and so all were moved to generosity to share what they had as well.

However, this interpretation does not fit the facts at all. There would have been no reason for the majority to bring a lunch. And even if they had, then most would not have been hungry, but only a few... yet everyone was hungry. Are we to believe they forgot about the bread and fish in their pockets until a boy brought out his? And that then there was enough to share with their neighbors that forgot food? And that there was 12 basketfuls of food after *everyone* at until they were full? And one more detail: 2) Everyone wanted to make Jesus king by force when this was all done. Why? Because he taught them a lesson on sharing? Or because he miraculously gave them a free lunch? No, there was a real miracle that happened that day, and this miracle teaches us something very important, as we will soon see.

**Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat,**

Jesus gave to the disciples who distributed. Jesus multiplied the food thousands of times to feed so many. And they didn't just get a couple bites... it was a full meal. All ate as much as they wanted!

**When they had all had enough to eat, [Jesus] said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.**

The huge amount of leftovers proved the miracle beyond any doubt. They also testified to the greatness of the miracle.

**After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.**

Before we talk about what Jesus is teaching us through this story, would you please note the attributes of this meal: 1) Free of charge / not deserved. 2) Offered to all. 3) As much as each wanted. 4) Overflowing in amount. Jesus clearly demonstrated his love and mercy, as well as his power.

So what does God want us to take from this true miracle story? In a narrow sense, this story illustrates that when God commands us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” there is the promise attached that he will indeed provide it. Although he typically provides that bread through natural means, like through our hard work, or through the generosity of others, he can and sometimes does provide through supernatural means as well. Trust God to provide all you need. (Not all you want... but all you need.)

In a broader sense, this story teaches us about God’s grace for us. We come to God with our pockets empty. We have nothing to offer him... unless you count sin, disobedience and rebellion as “something to offer him.” That’s all we bring to the table. Disobedience. But in God’s love... love that originates solely in him, and who *he* is... he provides what we need. He gives us the forgiveness of sins. He does so at great cost to himself. It cost the perfect life and innocent death of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. But for us? It is... 1) Free of charge / not deserved. 2) Offered to all. Forgiveness is offered to everyone on the planet, and the sacrifice of Jesus is sufficient for all. 3) As much as each needed. Whether you have done horrible and many sins, or fewer and smaller (from human perspective), Jesus provides all the grace you need for full and complete forgiveness. In fact... 4) Overflowing in amount. Paul says where sin abounds, grace does much more abound. God’s grace overflows. My Mom likes to say that her cup overflows from God’s grace, and she’s drinking from the saucer.

One more comforting idea to take from this text: In the hands of Jesus what seems meager and inadequate is multiplied and made sufficient. In the hands of Jesus, the ordinary becomes miraculous. The ordinary can be multiplied beyond its natural characteristics. 5 loaves and 2 small fish became enough to feed thousands. And we see this theme repeated throughout Scriptures. Put limited resources in the hands of Jesus and it’s multiplied beyond belief.

- Death of a man who was actually the Son of God atoned for the sins of the whole world. A miracle of multiplication.
- 12 guys leading 120 people start a worldwide religion of over a billion. A miracle of multiplication.
- A wooden cross which was a common instrument of torture becomes a symbol of forgiveness, life and salvation. A miracle of the ordinary becoming extraordinary.

- Or consider the sacraments: A washing with ordinary water is connected with the word and promise of God and it becomes a miraculous spiritual washing which creates faith and connects a person to Christ? Incredible!
- Ordinary bread and cheap table wine combined with the word and promise of God become a miraculous meal that feeds the soul, forgives sin and sustains us for eternal life? Incredible!
- Your life, as ordinary as it may seem to you, in the hands of almighty God, redeemed by the blood of his Son and indwelt by the Holy Spirit becomes a powerful force in the kingdom of God that becomes extraordinary and multiplied many times to bring glory to God as you pour out love to others. Incredible!

So listen: Don't assess your life, or the difficulties you face in life in light of your own meager resources. (That's what Philip did – not enough money – and Andrew – only 5 loaves and 2 small fish - did. They didn't realize the one they were speaking to had the power to miraculously change the situation.) Jesus can multiply your resources.

Don't we doubt him all the time? I have 'x' amount of income and 'y' amount of expenses. Y is greater than x, so the situation is hopeless. Not in the hands of Jesus. He can multiply your income with an extra job or an unexpected gift or inheritance. He can multiply your faith as you learn to trust on him day to day for you needs.

I have this health issue and it's serious. As I look ahead to the coming months or years, I know I don't have the emotional and mental resources to deal with it. But how about enough for today? Could you leave room for God to multiply your resources or change your health?

I am stuck in this relationship that's just not working. It's been like this for months or years, and I can't deal with it. When you yield to God and become the person he wants you to be in that relationship, God can change things. He can multiply your resources with patience and wisdom and love and giving that go beyond what you naturally have.

Like Jesus' disciples, don't we often limit God to our current resources and even though we ask, we just know there's nothing he can do about our situation, because, well, look at the current realities! But we discount the fact that God is God. Current realities are no guarantee of future results. God is powerful! He is loving. Proof: Cross of Christ.

So here's what we need to learn how to do. God is creating faith in you right now so that you will place your problem, your challenging circumstances, your finances, your health, your career, your family, your sin... into the hands of God. I can't tell you how God will help you, but I do know this... in the hands of God, your need will be met as God sees fit and most likely with resources or multiplication that you can't even anticipate. Trust in him. The one who took care of your sin debt by multiplying forgiveness through the sacrifice of Jesus, will take care of your needs... somehow, some way. Trust God. Right now, place your problem or need... in God's hands. Amen.