

## Jesus Feeds the Hungry

**John 6:1-15**

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I believe that Jesus feeds the hungry. He feeds our physical hunger and he feeds our spiritual hunger. That is the point of the miracle in our text today.

The Bible indicates that God puts his people to the test. Jesus is God incarnate—God in the flesh come to live among us—and so it is no surprise that he should deliberately put his followers to the test, as he says in John 6:6, “He asked this only to *test* him...”

Testing is different from temptation. Temptation is negative; it stirs sinful desires and leads to sinful acts. Testing, on the other hand, seeks to stir the imagination and leads to higher levels of faith. If the object of temptation is to destroy your soul, then the object of testing is to grow your soul. Jesus wants to grow the souls of his followers. He does not want them stagnant, passive and complacent, but living, active and growing. The question he puts before us this morning is this: In the face of human need, is Jesus enough? Is Jesus all-sufficient? Will Jesus supply our every need? Or, should we look somewhere else, to earthly leaders and earthly circumstances and earthly wealth to provide for us?

Two disciples flunk the test: Phillip and Andrew. Their failure is astounding, because in John 2 they saw Jesus turn 180 gallons of water into wine. Yet here on the hillsides of Galilee they can only think of scarcity and impossibility. They don't have enough to buy the food. They don't have enough to share around the crowd. They don't provide any answers to the problems of hunger and human need. All they can do is point out the impossibility. Gone is the confident faith of Mary at Cana who counseled the servants to “do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5)

There are 2 billion people on this planet who live on less than \$2 a day. What if I told you that the greatest obstacle to the problem of hunger and malnutrition is in the human heart?

Here's another thought: at the most conservative estimate, there are 13,000 people in this county who do not know and love Jesus Christ as their personal savior. What if I told you that the major obstacle to their salvation is in the hearts of us who believe and follow Christ?

But there is one disciple who passes the test Jesus administers today. It is the nameless little boy with his five barley loaves and two sardines. Barley was a cheap and less desirable grain in the ancient world, which points to the poverty of this kid. He knows what Jesus wants. He knows

what it takes to fund a miracle. He does not believe in scarcity or impossibility. He believes in abundance. He believes in God, and by implication, that God has come in the flesh in Jesus Christ. For this boy, the answer is a no-brainer: just give Jesus all that you have, and it will always be enough. O that each of us could have the faith of a child! O that each of us could finally release our tightly-held belief in scarcity and trust in God's abundance! Then this planet would eat and be satisfied. Then souls would be added by the thousands to the kingdom!

What happens next comes right out of Psalm 23. The Good Shepherd leads the people to green grass where they lie down. Then he prepares a banquet for them so rich and abundant that their cups truly run over. The leftovers are greater than the food he started with! There are 12 baskets—one for each disciple—so that they might remember that Jesus is God and he supplies our every need with abundance. Jesus made wine, and now he has made bread. This we commemorate in Holy Communion. Jesus provides our physical needs in bread and cup, and Jesus provides our spiritual needs through his broken body and shed blood.

Where do we go from here? What are we to make of this miracle, and most importantly, what do we do with Jesus? The crowd sees a political opportunity. They want to take Jesus and force him to be their king. (John 6:15) They see a guy who would be useful in their struggle against Rome and in advancing their political agenda. They want to own Jesus and use Jesus. But Jesus refuses all political power. It may disturb you, but Jesus cannot be made into a Democrat or a Republican. If you try to make him into your political image, he will slip away from you. To be sure, he has given us a political agenda: Feed the hungry! Show mercy! Seek justice and righteousness! Strive for peace and stand for freedom. But it was never his intention to found a political party or to legislate. It is not the church's role to run the state, but it is our task to be the moral conscience of the state. Our main tool is spiritual: we seek to change the world by preaching and living the gospel of Jesus Christ. The best and greatest thing we can do for the nation is to be the church.

Perhaps no modern Christian understood this miracle better than Norman Borlaug—a humble Lutheran farmer from Minnesota who in 1970 became the first and only person to win a Nobel Peace prize for agriculture. He was the father of the Green Revolution, and he demonstrated the truth of this miracle that God will supply *all* our food needs. He showed that every nation on earth has the capacity to feed its own people. There is no agricultural reason for famine or malnutrition on planet earth. Under his influence, countries like Mexico, India and

China became food exporters. God has provided us with a planet that can produce food in abundance. The reasons for hunger and malnutrition lie in the human heart and will. In his Nobel address Dr. Borlaug quoted from Isaiah, Joel, Amos and Jesus. He challenged the world with these words, “We will be guilty of criminal negligence, without extenuation, if we permit future famines.”

Philip and Andrew were going to permit a famine because they believed in scarcity and impossibility. Dr. Borlaug has taught us all the same lesson Jesus gives: God will provide in abundance. The only reason anyone goes hungry is because human beings permit it. They permit it because they have the wrong beliefs. They are committed to the idea of scarcity and they are committed to the idea of being alone in a godless world. But one little boy who believed in God and acted in faith unleashed a miracle. Dr. Borlaug is like this little boy. He demonstrated that God can feed the planet, if we permit it.

As it is in the physical realm, so it is in the spiritual realm. There is a spiritual famine around us—13,000 people within a 20 minutes drive of our church who do not know Jesus Christ. They are lost like we all once were. I want you to see these people who are normally invisible to us in the church. And now that we see them, let’s consider Jesus’ question: where are they going to get the Bread of Life for their souls?

The “Phillips” among us are going to say something like this: “We couldn’t possibly hire enough pastors to call on them all.” The “Andrews” among us are going to say something like this: “Look, I spend an hour in worship and an hour a week at my prayer meeting—how far can this possibly go among so many?” But the little children among us are going to say something like this: “Today, I’m going to invite the kid next door to Sunday school.”

When Michael Jordan led the Chicago Bulls to 3 consecutive NBA championships, his teammates followed a very simple strategy: get the ball into Michael’s hands. So church, you may not think you have much, but give what you have to Jesus, and it will become more than enough.