

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI**

“And All Were Satisfied”

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“Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children” (Matthew 14:19-21).

Dr. Kurt Taylor, from Concordia University Wisconsin, has been preaching and teaching here about once a month. The Lord has truly blessed Good Shepherd with Dr. Taylor’s gifts. He is outstanding in the pulpit and classroom, so good, in fact, that I’m concerned the attendance will surge whenever he rolls into town. So, after his last sermon here I told him if he wants to continue preaching in Good Shepherd’s pulpit, he’s going to have to give up a sleeper every now and then, something long, dull, and meandering, and offensive even, would be good.

I heard a sermon like that once (long, dull, meandering, and theologically offensive). It happened to be on this text, the feeding of the 5000. I was still at the seminary. We were at a downtown St. Louis church, not an LCMS church. Rather a church known for its neo-gothic architectural beauty and its heavily endowed music program. So many things were beautiful about the service . . . the architecture, the liturgy, the cantor, the choir, the bells, the organ. The preacher had everything going for him. It was all teed up for him. Anything faithful would have been a smashing success. But this fellow had problems with things miraculous. He said “it is just possible that each individual in that crowd received a token piece of food: a crumb of bread or a bit of fish.” Can you picture it . . . Jesus cutting those poor little fish into 5,000 plus pieces? Surely that would have been the greatest of His miracles!

Perhaps seeing there was trouble with his first alternative, the preacher offered a second. Maybe everyone brought some food along, he said, but they were hiding it under their robes because it would have been rude to eat in front of other hungry people. A boy saved the day by offering Jesus his lunch: five rolls and two fish. The example of the boy’s generosity inspired everyone else to share their own hidden caches of food. And so the moral was to share with others and in so doing you will inspire others to do the same. Again, seems far-fetched.

There is, of course, a third alternative: a genuine miracle took place. Jesus is perfectly capable of feeding 5,000 because He is compassionate and because He is the Son of God. He can do whatever it is He wants. So this is a display of Jesus’ compassion and power and authority. There’s a big, hungry crowd and practically zero food and no supermarket in sight. The only thing the disciples can think to do is send the people home. Jesus replies, “They don’t need to go home. You give them something to eat.” “But we have only five loaves and two fish” to which Jesus says, “Have the people sit down!”

He takes the loaves and the fish and looks up to heaven and gives thanks to God. He breaks the bread and gives it to his disciples who in turn give it to the crowds. Jesus gives and gives and gives, and however much he gives, there is always more to give. Everybody eats. Everybody has enough to eat. In fact, there are twelve heaping baskets full of leftovers. Those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

How did He do it? Matthew doesn’t say, nor is he interested in trying to explain the miraculous. That’s not the point. The point is people were hungry and Jesus graciously and miraculously fed them. All were satisfied.

By the way, “satisfied” is the polite way of translating the Greek. I was delighted to learn the word (*chortazomai*) is the same word used also for the fattening of cattle. So, it would not be wrong to say they all ate until they were stuffed. Apparently, it was so good they couldn’t help themselves. Of course, it was good; it was from the hands of Jesus! So, they don’t just nibble around the edges. They stuff themselves full.

Who provided it? Jesus. Was there enough? More than enough! Did the people do anything to earn this meal? Nope. Did it cost the people anything? Not a penny! Do you think there were some scoundrels, scoffers, fools and other sinners among that crowd whom the Lord fed? You betcha! In fact, every one of them was all those things. And yet, see how the Lord loved them and cared for them!

It’s a picture of the grace of God. Jesus does the giving. We do the receiving. There is no cost, nor could we pay even if we wanted. And as much as we receive, he always has more to give, more than we either desire or deserve.

It makes me think of how God cared for his people in the wilderness. He rained down manna on them. It tasted like bread made with honey. They could eat as much as they wanted. So, there was never a need to hoard it. Each day there would be enough, and the next day there would be more. The grace of God was in that manna. It was free. It was generous.

It was for all. And it was sufficient. God would use it to sustain them in the wilderness until He brought them into the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey. But some of those ingrates would even grow to resent it and yearn for other food. “We never see anything but this manna!” they said. How patient God was with them! He kept providing for them, more than they either desired or deserved.

Still today, he’s always more ready to hear than we to pray, and more ready to give than we to receive. And like the manna He provided of old, His grace is free, generous, and it is sufficient. It will bring us to the Promised Land.

In the Old Testament lesson today, the Lord is nearly begging us to feast on His grace. “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” Four times we hear the invitation “Come!” It seems this text mimics the sounds of the marketplace where the staples of life – water, bread, milk, wine – could be bought. It’s all good, and it’s all free. “You who have no money, come buy and eat!” The Lord our God has already paid the price of grace. It’s not reserved for society’s elite, or for the good and reputable. It’s reserved for those who can humbly receive by faith what is freely given them. His grace is only withheld from those who think they are self-made and self-sufficient.

It makes me think again of the parable Jesus told about a king giving a wedding feast for his son. Who wouldn’t want to go to a royal wedding where the best of everything is served? Are there really people who would decline such an invitation? In the parable there are . . . lots of them. In the parable, the king must send waves of servants out nearly begging people to come. “I have prepared my dinner. My oxen and fat calves have been slaughtered. Come to the wedding feast!” But they pay no attention. They think they have better things to do. One goes off to his business, another to his field. Undeterred and determined to fill his hall with guests, the King tells his servants to go out to the main roads and invite anyone you find, good or bad, “invite ‘em all!” Is that not another picture of God’s grace! No matter who you are, what you’ve done, or how little you have . . . the King Himself invites you to his royal wedding banquet. He doesn’t vet His guests based on their reputation, nor on their ability to pay. The king alone bears the cost. And notice, no one is forced to obey the summons. No one is dragged in against his will.

It’s like the Lord’s Supper, where the food we need the most is given us. It’s for sinners, not for the righteous. It’s our manna in the desert of this world, and it is sufficient grace until we are in the Promised Land.

When Jesus fed the five thousand, did you notice the sequence of the verbs? “He took . . . gave thanks . . . broke . . . and gave it to his disciples.” These are the same verbs later used when He instituted the Lord’s Supper. The feeding of the five thousand is a foretaste of the Lord’s Supper, where the Lord also provides bread and wine for many thousands, which itself is a foretaste of the banquet in heaven, prepared for a host of people as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashore. Grace is at the center of each. Each meal is free. Each is for sinners. Each has more food offered than can be consumed. There is more going on here, more being given, than any of us can see, or appreciate, or take in. And at that banquet in heaven you can be sure there will more than enough there too, at table with all the saints and with Him, the King, the feast of rich things, the best of wines and the finest of meats,. Whether on earth or in heaven, Jesus gives and gives and gives, and however much he gives, he always has more to give.

One last thing. How can we respond to His grace? There are many ways, of course. But one way is to have compassion and give special care for the poor. In the Old Testament lesson, the Lord shows special concern for hungry people who had no money. “He who has no money, come, buy and eat!” he says. He asks no questions about why they are poor. He only extends an invitation: Come and eat.

The Lord has special care and compassion for the poor, and He wants us His people to share that care and compassion. Proverbs 14, “Whoever is kind to the needy honors God” (v. 31). Deuteronomy 15, “There will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore, I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor in your land” (v. 11). And in Matthew 25, Jesus says that whatever you do for the poor, the sick, the hungry, and the imprisoned, you do for him (v. 40).

God has high expectations of us and can be overwhelming. So it was for the disciples when Jesus said to them, “They don’t need to go away. You give them something to eat.” To them that was a ridiculous command. “We have only five loaves here and two fish!” But Jesus provided what was necessary to fulfill His expectations.

Maybe the Lord has dropped someone into your lap whom He wants you to care for – a friend, a neighbor, a family member. It may feel the needs are far greater than your resources. What to do? Be honest as the disciples were honest. “Lord, I can’t do it. I don’t have enough.” But then pray about it and keep an eye out to see how God provides. He gives and gives and He still uses us, His disciples, to distribute His gifts to those in need. Amen.