

## JESUS, THE BREAD OF LIFE

Mark 6.35-44; 8.1-10; John 6.35, 41-51

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**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.**

Most of us are familiar with the story of the feeding of the 5000. Jesus took five loaves and two fish and fed 5000 people. Afterwards, 12 baskets filled to the brim were collected. The earliest Christians must have really loved this story because it's the *only* story that occurs in all four Gospels, apart from the stories of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. It must be pretty central if all four Gospel-writers thought it worth recording.

Let's take a closer look at the story. Five thousand people have come out into the wilds to hear Jesus. It's very late. The sun is setting. It's a deserted place. No grocery stores. No convenient stores. No farm stands selling fresh produce. The disciples advise Jesus to send the crowds away to food in nearby villages. But Jesus answered, "You give them something to eat."

The first lesson we learn is that Christians share a responsibility to feed the hungry. In fact, Jesus once said that God will judge the reality of our faith on the last day on the basis of how we've responded to hungry people. On the day of Judgment the Son of Man will say to the sheep on his right, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food." Whenever we see a hungry person, we're actually looking at Jesus. That little baby crying at night keeping you from getting your sleep - that's Jesus crying out, "Feed me!"

Here are several practical ways we can obey his command to give them something to eat.

We can support the ministry of the *Neighborhood Services Center*. This year NSC has met over 200 hunger needs. Our mission giving supports the Neighborhood Services Center. A

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small portion of the money you put in the offering plate goes to feed the hungry in obedience the command of Jesus.

Another way we obey the command of Jesus is through our annual CROP walk which raises money for hungry people. This year the walk takes place on October 15. Walkers will ask you to pledge money – say one dollar for every kilometer of the ten kilometer walk. Ten kilometers is how far most people in developing countries have to walk every day for food and water. Twenty five percent of the money raised comes back to Oxford to meet the food needs of local hungry people through the *Neighborhood Services Center*. Seventy five percent goes to meet the needs of hungry people around the world. Mark it on your calendars and start getting into shape to walk. I urge you to walk and/or pledge to the *CROP* walk. Here's a very concrete way we can obey what Jesus said, "You give them something to eat."

Another practical suggestion. In this election year listen to what the candidates say about our responsibility towards the hungry. Do a little research on the success or failure of programs like *Women, Infants, Children (WIC)*, or *Food Stamps*, or the federal School lunch program. My research discovers that, although many of these began as partisan programs, today they enjoy widespread bipartisan support.

So, there are three practical ways to obey the command of Jesus: get more familiar with *Neighborhood Services Center*, get involved in the *CROP* walk, listen to what the candidates say about our responsibility for the hungry.

Secondly, notice how Jesus asks, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." The disciples take a quick audit and find "Five loaves and two fish." Not much food for so many people. But let Jesus ask us, today, how many loaves we have. Within our congregation we'd have far more than five loaves and two fish - maybe several hundred loaves including hot-dog

and hamburger rolls, bagels, English muffins, raisin and cinnamon bread not to mention donuts and sweet rolls. We have far more resources at hand to feed the hungry than Jesus and his disciples. Back then, they needed a miracle. We don't really need a miracle. There's enough food in the world to nourish five billion people. We don't need a miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish. We need a miracle of a different sort - a miracle of the will to use our resources in wise ways so that nobody needs to go to bed hungry.

For example, in 1984 the Presbytery of Western New York sent me to Guatemala to visit Presbyterian churches. I met a man, the son of Presbyterian missionaries, who returned to Guatemala after receiving a college degree in agriculture. He knew the *Quiche* language of the descendants of the *Mayas*. He knew the people. He loved them. He bought a small plot of land in a poor Indian village where he lived, worked and worshipped. He didn't want to impose his ideas on the *Quiche* Indians who lived in the village. He wanted to empower them to use their meager resources in the most productive way. So he planted and tended his crops on a piece of land no larger than his neighbors. His neighbors eventually noticed how his crops were so much more successful and plentiful. Was it magic? Was it witchcraft? Was it a miracle? In response to their questions he introduced soil and environment friendly ways of growing crops more productively. Ten years later that village was a model of upward mobility and prosperity with plentiful food because of his quiet ministry. There was a miracle of sorts. The miracle was that his primary concern was not to gain personal wealth nor did he have the desire to take maintain a monopoly on the miracle of knowledge he possessed.

Thirdly, notice how Jesus thanked God before he distributed the loaves and fish. "He looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves..." I encourage you to pray before you eat. Before you eat lunch today, pause, bow your head and thank God for providing the food.



Thank God for farmers who planted the seeds. For sun and rain that let the food grow. For migrant workers who picked the vegetables, fruit and mushrooms. For factory workers where the food was processed. For factory owners who risk investments to build the factories. For transportation workers in trucks, trains, airplanes, and ships that transported the food. For Grocery stores workers who stock the shelves and work behind the check out counters. For your jobs that enable you to buy the food. Jesus always thanked God before he ate. Parents, begin today to say grace before your meals with your children. Couples, pray before your meals. It may be embarrassing at first because it involves intimacy. Thank God for your meals. Every meal is a miracle.

Finally, <sup>(we need more than bread; food, money, possessions)</sup> notice again what Jesus did when he blessed the bread. "Taking the loaves he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people." Doesn't that sound like something we do on Communion Sundays? Two weeks from today we'll celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion. In the sacrament of Holy Communion Jesus feeds us. Holy Communion foreshadows God's big banquet at the end of time. Jesus sends us out to invite all people to this great feast at the end of history. Food for all. The good news is that because of what Jesus has done for us in his life, death and resurrection – we're all invited to this banquet - this celebration at the end of time. And the sacrament of Holy Communion foreshadows that banquet. I urge you to prepare for the sacrament by going out and inviting people. Tell them we're having a meal and they're invited. Jesus is the host and Jesus is also the menu. He gives himself to us, the Bread of Life. Wouldn't it be wonderful to pack out the sanctuary with 5000 people and see if we could feed them all with a couple loaves?