

Multiplication

St. John vi. 1. ff. Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. 2 And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased. 3 And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. 4 And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh. 5 When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? 6 And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do. 7 Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. 8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, 9 There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? 10 And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. 11 And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. 12 When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. 13 Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten. 14 Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.

This lovely vignette provides us with insight as to how Christ works with us, and how we work with Him. Think of that wonderful verse: *Jesus Christ [is] the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever* (Heb. 13:8). We can count on the manner in which He interacted with His disciples to be the same as that which He employs with us. This will help make things very predictable.

This story is the only miracle to appear in all four Gospels, and the details in the accounts are similar. So one might conclude that it is of special importance to God.

Note the startling fact that Jesus turns the tables on Philip, and actually asks *him* how they are going to get out of a tight spot. Talk about a switch! It was Jesus who was usually approached with questions under such circumstances. And He was counted on to have the answers.

In the parallel Gospels accounts of this miracle, Jesus converses with His disciples about the situation, and when they question Him about the food situation, suggesting they go elsewhere to buy a meal, He replies, “*You give them something to eat.*”

So let’s consider a first premise, based upon this passage. When we are inclined to look elsewhere for solutions, Jesus may well require us to provide them. So we look around ourselves, and don’t see anything that can possibly meet the need at hand. Nevertheless, Jesus is encouraging us that the means are at hand, and that we possess them. They may look so ridiculously insufficient that we completely overlook them: *There is a lad here, with five barley loaves, and two fishes.*

So, who are *the five thousand*? It is the community of our families, neighbors, fellow citizens that surrounds us. Who are the disciples? You and me. Who is Jesus? Still Jesus. What are the loaves and fishes? Those inadequate “*some things*” that all of us possess. Nevertheless, small as they are, we do possess them. Now we must let Jesus use them.

Our interaction with the community is their opportunity to touch Jesus in us. We will be the medium through which He will reach the multitudes. We should consider every interaction a divine encounter. We are dispensaries of something that other needs. We vastly underestimate the power of God working in and through us. We confuse our natural gifts, our personality, and individuality, with the supernatural gifts which God has bestowed upon every believer: love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness, self-control. Where else can you find such qualities as these? They are nowhere else to be found.

Philip couldn't believe that his insufficiency would be up to the task. But he had a very humbling example in the *lad here*, who gave up his lunch willingly for a very uncertain purpose. *Lad here* means "a little boy." Do you find yourself reminded of Jesus' words:

Matt. 18:1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? 2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, 3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

The faith and humility of this little child ended up providing a feast for thousands!

So a second premise is that we must give our insufficiency to the Lord, in order for Him to do anything with it. There are any number of human agencies that could have prevented this miracle from coming to pass. Suppose Philip had been so dismissive of the boy's snack that he had disdained to mention it? Suppose the little boy had withheld it? Suppose, lastly, that it had simply not been brought to Christ?

Christ cannot do anything with that which He hasn't received. Am I deliberately keeping something from the Lord? If I don't truly believe that everything that I possess belongs to Him, then I have left myself private property, and in the end, it will be the source of my undoing. If we use the word "Lord" we mean someone who has all the rights of ownership, just like a "landlord," who owns a rental property. A lord first demands the title to everything, and if we've proved willing to yield it to him, he just may return an ever larger portion of it to us, entrusting it to our care and stewardship. Some of us find ourselves the victims of our own spiritual miserliness. We don't seem to get anywhere, nor to grow, because we've given Christ little or nothing to work with.

Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. 11 And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.

The third premise is that the Lord has been placed in a position to do His part. Now comes the miracle. The disciple admitted his insufficiency in the face of so great a task. The little boy in humility yielded up what he had at the request of a trusted adult. And the fish and the loaves were brought to Christ. Our Lord lays His holy hands upon the material of meat and bread, and instantly, their substance is multiplied, and re-multiplied, and spread throughout the hungry crowd. We do not know all the details. Perhaps the bread and fish continued to multiply as it went from hand to hand. But we do know that it was sufficient to the need, because *they were filled*. They weren't just teased or tantalized, or half-satisfied. Their hunger was assuaged.

I always thought that these words of Jesus were special: *Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost*. We're reminded of Moses' provision of manna in the wilderness, when the children of Israel were commanded to make no waste of their daily, heavenly provision. And this was holy bread and fish, because the hands of the Son of God had been laid upon it. It also reminds me of the bread at the altar, which the priest is commanded to handle carefully. *We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table*. The priest carefully makes sure that all of the remains of Holy Communion are carefully handled and consumed.

Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten. Can you imagine the amazement of the disciples when they realized the extent of the miracle? The sheer volume that had been distributed may well have been lost on almost everyone but they, as they had seen the original amount, witnessed its distribution, and now gazed upon the leftovers. If the little boy had been among them, how proud he must have been at his part!

It was a small part, but a very large one, indeed, when you consider the outcome. And that's where I want to leave you and me. Our part in the whole miracle of Christ's ongoing work of redeeming this world is a very small one indeed, but it is nevertheless a part. We just haven't gotten to the end yet, when the extent of Christ's great work, together with our partnership, will be evident by the sheer magnitude of its consequence.

So, what do you have? A few things for a yard sale? Some time to spend with someone who's not feeling well? A thoughtful phone call to someone whose day would be brightened by the sound of your voice? A kind word? A smile? Whatever it is, whether little or much, what will you give? It's never too small. Ours it is to give; His it is to multiply.

Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. The consequence of the successful human/divine partnership is that God is glorified, and Christ revealed. Not one single person failed to emerge a winner from this story! It is one that Christ desires to repeat over and over again, in countless ways, among us. *In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen*.