

“Give them Something to Eat”
Sermon Preached by Rev. Dr. Roxanne Jones Booth
Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church, August 18, 2019

To all of you my brothers and sisters in Christ, I greet you all in the wonderful name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

This is the day the Lord has made, we shall rejoice and be glad in it.

Please turn with me this morning to Mark 6: 32-37. The Scripture reads,

“So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. *“This is a remote place,” they said, “and it’s already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy something to eat.”*

But he answered, *“You give them something to eat.”*

This morning’s sermon topic is, “You Give the Something to Eat.” Let us pray...

Our text this morning takes us to a familiar passage in the Bible. Jesus feeds 5,000 people.

This is the only miracle of Jesus mentioned in all four Gospel writings. Matthew 14: 15-21; Mark 6:35-44; Luke 9:12-17 and John 6:6-13. Because all four Gospels tell the similar story, we are led to believe that the feeding of 5,000 people on the mountainside that day was quite the spectacle and worth telling.

Each of the Gospel writers tells the story of Jesus and his disciples having gone to a place to rest following ministry but when crowds of people hear that Jesus is around, they begin to show up to and follow him.

The Scripture text tells us that, *“they (meaning Jesus and the disciples) went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.”*

This is to say that Jesus and the disciples left one place by boat, but the people when they noticed that they were leaving followed them on foot around the body of water that Jesus and the disciples were on and by the time Jesus and his disciples arrived on the other side, the people were there to greet them.

The Scriptures say that, *“When Jesus landed and saw the crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So, he began teaching them many things.”*

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Jesus recognized that the people were in need. They were described as sheep without a shepherd.

Sheep need a shepherd. Sheep need protection. Sheep need someone to lead them to places to eat. Sheep need shepherds to bring them in for night and care tenderly for them. Sheep need a shepherd.

Jesus refers to those who follow him as sheep. In John 10 Jesus reminds us that sheep know the shepherd. Sheep listen for the shepherd's voice; the shepherd calls the sheep by name and the shepherd leads the sheep. Psalm 100 reminds us that we are the sheep of God's pasture.

Yes, Jesus is the good shepherd. This is why David wrote, "*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*" David recognized that as sheep are led by the shepherd, so God leads us through paths of righteousness. God restores us. We shall not want because the shepherd cares for the sheep.

Jesus sees the crowds of people and sees people in need of much care and protection. Jesus sees people needing to be nurtured and nourished, people needing to be told about the love of a great, merciful and just God who knows about their needs and is ready and able to meet their needs.

Jesus has compassion for the people because the shepherd loves the sheep. The shepherd sees to their needs.

Jesus begins to teach the people many things. Jesus is aware that the people need to hear what God would have them to hear. He begins to teach them many things.

The Scripture does not tell us exactly what Jesus taught; however, one thing is for sure, the people stayed to listen to all Jesus had to say.

However long it was, people stayed because what was being said mattered to them. It mattered to them so much that they didn't check the time and they didn't bother to leave.

What they were receiving from Jesus was so good, nothing else mattered. They were with the shepherd receiving from Jesus what they needed and that's all that mattered.

I imagine that while the crowd of people sat there listening to Jesus, listening to the good shepherd, they were receiving spiritual nourishment. They were receiving inspiration for the spirit that would keep them looking up **even when** things were going down.

I imagine while they listened to Jesus, they were receiving spiritual nutrition. They were receiving motivation for the soul that would keep them focused on living their lives to the glory of God **even though** others may ridicule them.

I imagine while the crowd of people listened to Jesus, they were receiving spiritual sustenance. They received fuel that would empower them to stay the course **in spite of** hindrances and setbacks.

Then the Scripture says, "*By this time it was late in the day.* The crowds of people had been with Jesus, listening to Jesus, being inspired by Jesus, being motivated by Jesus' words and being empowered spiritually to live their lives for God, and now it was noticed that "it was late in the day."

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It is late in the day and the disciples come to Jesus and say, “This is a remote place, and it’s already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”

Can you picture it?

A great crowd of people. People who have not only walked to where Jesus and the disciples are, but many of them having ran to get to this place where Jesus is before he even arrives. **This crowd of people has been with Jesus all day.**

This crowd has listened to Jesus’ every word all day and they have received the many things that Jesus has taught. Their spirits are full, their souls are revived and now the disciples come to Jesus late in the day telling Jesus, “the people need something to eat.”

When Jesus saw the crowd earlier in the day, he saw their need and now late in the day, Jesus is told by the disciples, the people’s need.

Earlier in the day, Jesus feed the crowd spiritually, late in the day, Jesus is told that the crowd needs to be feed physically.

All day long the people have been with Jesus. They have listened to his words. They have been there all day with Jesus and now at the point that is recognized that the crowd of people will need **physical food** the disciples suggest that the crowd be turned away to find food in the surrounding countryside. They tell Jesus to send the people away so they can “buy themselves something to eat.”

But Jesus tells them, “You give them something to eat.”

You know the rest of the story. In the Gospel of John 6: 6-13, we are told that they found the boy with his lunch of five loaves of bread and two fish and how Jesus blessed that meager lunch so that it fed 5,000 with 12 baskets left over. This is one of the great miracles of the Bible.

Imagine 5,000 hungry people show up uninvited and then stay for supper. Imagine ordering 5,000 pizzas. That would cost a pretty penny. Suppose you had to feed 5,000 people tonight. What would you do?

It’s late, the people are tired and hungry, and the local Subway is closed for remodeling. The nearest Applebee’s is in Jerusalem, and Pizza Hut doesn’t deliver to the wilderness. The disciples, I think, make a very practical suggestion: “Send them away and let them find food.” That’s logical. The suggestion is not made from bad motives. *In themselves the disciples had no resources to meet this enormous need.* They had no food and no money. What else could they do? The disciples’ answer was **they could do nothing!**

The disciples didn’t see 5,000 people; they saw 5,000 problems they couldn’t solve.

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Most of us would have said the same thing. **We're quick to see what we can't do and quick to talk about what we don't have.** The disciples saw the crowds and realized their inadequacy. Somehow, they forgot that the Son of God was standing right there with them.

I love it when Jesus says, "**You give them something to eat**" (verse 37). It's funny because the disciples have just gotten through explaining why they can't feed this massive crowd. They may have been thinking something like this: "You want us to feed this crowd? You gotta be kidding! Didn't you hear what we just said? We don't have any money and we don't have any food. What we have here is a failure to communicate."

But Jesus wouldn't let his disciples off the hook. He wants them **to get involved** in the blessing of helping others.

This is how Jesus often works with his followers. *Over and over again he puts us in positions where we are helpless, and then he says, "Do something!"* In our desperation, we cry out to heaven, "How?" and he replies, "I'm glad you asked." It's not that Jesus wants us to fail, but he does want us to know that without him we can do nothing. Our success depends totally upon him, and the sooner we learn that, the happier we will be.

Remember in the Gospel of John, we are told that a little boy had a lunch of two fish and five loaves of bread. In Matthew, it says they found out they had five loaves and two fish.

We should not miss the obvious lesson here: *Don't ever despise small things.* Just because something is small or seemingly insignificant doesn't mean God can't use it. Size does not matter to God. God can use anything we offer. (Moses, the rod in his hand, David, one stone and sling shot)

God often puts us in situations where we are doomed to failure in order to force us to depend totally on him so that when the miracle comes, he alone gets the credit. This is a divine strategy repeated many times in the Bible and in our own experience.

We often find ourselves in desperate situations with no way out, no good options, and no human way of remedying our situation. God allows this to happen so that we will cry out to him. And when the deliverance comes, we are obliged to give God the total credit.

Finding joy is packaged in trusting God in all things and lean not to your own understanding. The Scripture continues to say in Proverbs 3:5, *in all your ways acknowledge Him and he shall direct your path.*

Yes, God is real! Real in my soul...