

Matthew 14:13-21

No matter how you add them up, five and two do not equal twelve. And it would be absurd to suggest that these same two numbers could equal the sum of five thousand. Which is why the story recorded in our text for today makes little sense to our rational, logical minds. We can sympathize with Jesus' disciples. "You give them something to eat," He told them. But they could do the math. The only food they had were five loaves of bread and two fish. There were thousands of hungry stomachs around them—five thousand men plus women and children. This small amount of food could not feed such an army of people. Five plus two doesn't come anywhere close to equaling five thousand. But you know how the story ends. Every person there ate and was satisfied. And when the broken pieces were picked up, twelve baskets of bread and fish were left over. Go figure.

What the disciples failed to understand is that the problem before them was not a math problem; it was a multiplication problem. They would have been correct to reason that five loaves and two fish cannot equal five thousand stomachs. But they were doing math when they should have been doing multiplication. Five loaves and two fish times the might and mercy of Jesus does equal five thousand...with a remainder of twelve baskets left over.

I think that we today are also doing too much math when we really should be multiplying. On a pretty regular basis we don't see how things add up. How can we pay the bills with such a small amount of money? How can I find time to fit everything that needs to be done into my busy schedule? There isn't enough time. There isn't enough money. And there are days when there isn't enough love and compassion. We become irritable and upset with others; even our supposed "loved ones."

We may feel as frustrated as Jesus' disciples felt who were just handed an impossible math problem to figure out. And they would never have figured it out as long as they kept trying to do math. With Jesus out of the picture, nothing adds up. Feed five thousand men with five loaves and two fish? Forget it! It will never happen. But put Jesus in the mix and everything works out. The disciples learned this as they watched Jesus multiply the loaves and fish right before their eyes. The question is: Have we learned this in our daily lives?

We have problems too. Perhaps not on the order of feeding a large crowd with a few morsels of food; but our problems can be overwhelming to us just as these disciples were overwhelmed by the problem facing them. I'm quite sure that each one of us has one problem (probably more) weighing upon our minds right now. And when or if it becomes solved, more problems will be waiting right around the corner. Health problems, money problems, time problems, relationship problems do not go away. They will come, and go, and come again for as long as we live.

And we are prone to do what Jesus' disciples did. With the problem facing them, they looked not at what they had, but at what they did not have. "We have only five loaves and two fish," they complained; ("not enough to get the job done.") They could have said, but didn't, "Look, we do have some food, and we do have Jesus with us, and so everything will work out."

What do you have? For whatever problem you have, God gives you the means to deal with it. You have twenty-four hours each day. You have some money. You have friends and

family—if not out there, then you do here in our congregation. You have life, even if it is not the healthiest life. You have five loaves and two fish. God has provided you with what you need. It may not be much. It may not even seem to be enough. But remember what else you have—you have Jesus here with you. And with Jesus in the picture, even when it seems like things won't add up, things do work out because He multiplies to you His love, mercy, and blessings.

Martin Luther read God's Word every morning. Did he always have the time? No...he made the time. And when his day was going to be especially busy, he got up even earlier so that his time in God's Word was not neglected. Luther had no more time than we have, but the time that he spent in the Word of God made the rest of his time each day a blessing from God.

Is your time not adding up? Are things simply not getting done because your schedule is too busy? Each week spent in God's House, and each day spent in God's Word will multiply His blessing of time to you. His Word brings order out of chaos. It brings priorities into our life so that our time each day is lived at peace with God and with the world.

Is money the problem? The answer is in Jesus' words for you: "Seek first the Kingdom of God...and all these things (such as food, clothing, and shelter) will be added unto you." A Christian should know that money problems will not add up right as long as Jesus is out of the picture. But just watch God take care of your needs as His Kingdom is put first. St. Paul learned to be content even when he had little, because the Word and Worship of God were always first for him. God may not have in mind for you to become wealthy, but He does know what you need, and He provides. Be faithful with His Word and just watch as He multiplies the loaves and fish for your life.

If the problem is with your health, look not at what you don't have, but at what you do have. Your reason and senses, your life is a gift from God. If He allows these to be taken, He will not leave you nor will He forsake you. In heaven all these will be restored to you in full. As you hear and trust His words for you, His promise to you is made certain—nothing can separate you from His love for you in Christ Jesus your Lord...not even life and health, or the lack of it.

Is there a problem with friends and family? With God all things are possible. In His word of pardon He multiplies to you the blessing of forgiveness. And now you can forgive those who have wronged you. You can bring peace to where there is hurt. You can apply healing to where there is pain. As Jesus' disciples carried the bread and fish to the people, so you can carry God's mercy into those relationships where there is friction and tension.

Friends, history is filled with the sad accounts of people whose lives simply did not add up because they lived apart from Christ and His Word. But you are baptized into Christ. You are here to receive His body and blood for you. Christ is present here in His Word for you. And so you don't have to worry about trying to do the math in your life—things may look as if they won't add up; problems may seem insurmountable, but God is for you; Christ Jesus is on your side. Through whatever bread and fish He has given you, He will multiply for you His blessings; He will allow you to deal with the problems in life.

You know what should not add up, but does—and it's all because of Jesus? God's gift of forgiveness, life, and salvation to you. You and I have broken God's Commandments. We have lived as though only we have mattered. We have failed to do the things we ought to do. We have done the things which are wrong and sinful. This adds up to eternal death in hell. Disobeying God, living selfish, self-centered lives, equals eternal punishment. But in mercy Jesus stepped into the picture for you. He went to the cross in your place. His Father multiplied upon Him the agony you and I deserved. He felt the pain of the whip many times over. And because He suffered for you, God multiplies His mercy toward you. Have you sinned in your heart? Repent. God forgives you. In this sacred bread He multiplies for you His gracious pardon. He never ceases to be merciful to you. Even though your disobedience keeps adding up, God for Jesus' sake, doesn't do the math. Instead He multiplies your sins against the cross of your Savior, and this means that your sins are all forgiven; they are all wiped clean by Jesus' blood.

Friend, Jesus is here for you in Word and Sacrament. No problem is too great for Him. No sin is too wretched; He died for them all. Even death and hell is no match for Him. He's been there and done that. He went there for you. And so for you now is only grace and every blessing. Your life is not a math problem for you to solve. Think multiplication. Every gift of God is multiplied to you for the sake of, and through Christ Jesus your Lord. The story of the feeding of the five thousand may have happened once long ago; but for you in Christ, it happens every day, as each and every day is lived in Christ. Amen.