

John 6:1-15

What do we take home from this story? The disciples took home twelve baskets of leftover food. What about us? There are those who believe that this story teaches us to be optimistic. The disciples could only see the problem, but Jesus saw the solution. While it's good to avoid a pessimistic outlook on life, if that's what we take home from the story then we're missing out on the best part. There are those who believe the story teaches us that Jesus is the Almighty God because He was able to multiply the fish and bread to feed more than 5,000 people. A wonderful truth to learn—but let's take home even more than that.

Let's begin by looking at the phrase, "He asked this only to test him." (John 6:6) Jesus had asked Philip, "Where shall we buy enough bread for these people to eat?" Today we might call this a "trick question." There is no correct answer. "Nowhere" is the only appropriate response. Even if they could find a place which had enough bread to feed all these people, they would not have enough money to buy it.

So what was the test? Jesus was testing Philip... what answer was Jesus looking for? Wasn't He wanting Philip to live, not by sight, but by faith? He wanted Philip and the others to realize that there was no human solution, but what is impossible for men is possible with God. Christ is the answer. Christ is the solution. What Philip could not do, Jesus took care of.

Do you think it's possible that God is still testing us today? What problems are in your life... How can we deal with terrorism? How can I pay the bills? How can my marriage survive? How can I endure my sickness? How can our congregation become more spiritual? What answer will you give? What solutions do you see to your problems? Perhaps, as with Philip, there is no human solution, but what is impossible for you and I to solve is possible with God.

A young boy had five loaves and two fish, and you know what happened—Jesus multiplied that food to feed everyone. They all ate, were satisfied, and there was much left over. Now we need to ask this question, and it's a very important question: Was this a "one-time-only-miracle," or does God still work in such ways today?

Really, any farmer could give us the answer. He plants his seed into the ground and that seed multiplies many times over to produce a crop. This is not because of "Mother Nature"—this is the hand of God. He still feeds us today by multiplying for us the many blessings He gives to us. Not one of us is starving to death. Not one of us is living in poverty. God sees to it that you are blessed with what you need for this life just as He saw to it that the 5,000 were well-fed.

And if there is a problem which you and I just cannot solve, Jesus is the answer—He is the solution. We may never be free from the threat of terrorism in our lifetime, but we need not fear those who can kill the body because Jesus has defeated death and the grave for us.

We may always struggle with paying the bills, but there is more to life than what we have. Life is all about Jesus Christ, and by His sufferings, death, and resurrection He paid your debt of sin. In Holy Baptism He gives you eternal life, and no unpaid bill can ever take that away from you.

Sicknesses may come and go, but we have something which lasts forever. God's promises to us in Christ are sure and certain. He forgives your sins no matter how sick or healthy you may be. Your sicknesses are never a punishment for how you have lived, but God turns them into a blessing by using our weaknesses to turn our eyes toward Christ.

The problems we have within our families and with each other may be too difficult for us to solve, but they cannot separate us from the love of Christ. And because He forgives us, we can forgive each other.

And how do we become more spiritual? We cannot, but God can for us. The Word of Christ is powerful and as He gathers us here around that Word, we will become stronger in Christ as He works within us and through us.

So what does this story teach us? That what you and I see as problems always have a solution in Jesus Christ, and that God still today multiplies His blessings to us.

Now there is one other phrase in our text that we need to look at: Jesus gave the people "as much as they wanted." (John 6:11) How much do you want? Since God multiplies His blessings to us, how much do you want of His blessings?

I think it's very true that all of us would eagerly take all the fish and bread that we could gather, but His grace and mercy in Christ—those blessings we would take only a little bit. It's true. How many of us would turn down a pay raise? How many of us would refuse to cash a check given as a gift? How many of us would turn away a helping hand? None of us! We eagerly accept all the fish and bread that God gives us. We never say, "No," to His material blessings. But when God multiplies His grace and mercy to us, then we take a different stance. We say, "No, thanks, but I've had enough." "No, Jesus, I'm not interested in studying Your Word in a Bible Class. I have enough of Your grace already." "No, Jesus, I don't need Your body and blood today. I get enough of Your forgiveness to satisfy me."

Jesus gave the people "as much as they wanted," and He does the same for us. If I'm not growing in faith, it's because I don't want much of the Word of Christ. If I have doubts about my salvation, it's because I don't want much of the grace of God.

Now I do not know how much fish and bread God will keep giving you through life. He gives material blessings as He sees best for us. He will take care of your physical needs according to His gracious will. But your spiritual needs are much more urgent, and even though you and I take His grace for granted, He keeps giving it. Even though we would take only a little bit of His mercy, He pours it out upon us abundantly. He doesn't forgive just a few of your sins—He forgives them all! He doesn't extend just part of His mercy to you—He is completely merciful toward you! Jesus didn't suffer for just some of your punishment—He suffered every punishment that you deserved! Whenever you come up to the Lord's Table, Jesus always gives you every bit of life and salvation that He has to give! As you eat of His flesh and drink of His blood He always gives Himself fully to you and for you.

Even though you and I focus more upon the material blessings in life, God multiplies His grace to you anyway. And that is truly comforting because, like Philip, you and I struggle with the solution to our greatest problem. I see my sins and they are greater, by far, than the number of people who gathered there before Jesus that day. What can I do? What can you do? Like Philip, we see no solution. We have no solution. Like the disciples that day, we are unable, but Jesus is able.

Our sins are too much for us to handle, but Jesus took care of the problem for you. He went to the cross and He died, and His blood was poured out for sinners. And just like that bread and fish kept multiplying so that everyone received some, so the blood of Christ was shed for every sinner. There wasn't a person there that day that didn't get bread and fish to eat. And there isn't a single sin of yours that is not covered by the blood of Jesus. He multiplies His mercy for you every day, over and over. As often as you sin; as stubborn as your heart may be, Jesus keeps forgiving you because, though your sins may add up, He multiplies His grace to always wipe them clean. You may not have been in God's House for many months. Friend, your sins are forgiven. God does not hold them against you. Christ died for you. His mercy for you is multiplied many times over. You can never out-sin God's grace in Christ.

And why would you want to even try? Knowing that you have a merciful God for the sake of Jesus, isn't that why you want to live for Him? Believing that eternal life is yours in Christ Jesus, isn't that reason to lay aside your stubbornness and rejoice in what your Savior has done for you?

The disciples took home twelve baskets of fish and bread that day. What will you take home today? Even more! Not fish and bread, but grace and mercy, forgiveness and eternal life. It's yours right now. Jesus declares you forgiven. God is at peace with you. He is merciful to you...and it doesn't stop the minute you walk out that door—the multiplying goes on and on. You go to your home forgiven. You go to your bed at night in the hands of a gracious God. You wake up each morning and begin each day with a merciful God taking care of you and forgiving you. No, you won't be leaving here today with baskets of fish and bread. Much better...you leave with every spiritual blessing in Christ that God has to give. Amen.