

Small and Mighty
[Matthew 14:15-21](#)
[Mark 6:35-44](#), [Luke 9:12-17](#), [John 6:5-14](#)

Invariably, if an accident were to occur right outside on Route 108, each of us would present different accounts of what exactly happened. Somewhere in the composite picture lies the truth. So it is with today's gospel lesson. Interestingly enough, this event where Jesus feeds over 5,000 people is the only miracle depicted in all four gospels. Clearly this is a significant event. Jesus takes something small and produces something mighty and in fact exceeds expectations. Perhaps we should explore the event from all four sources.

There is fair agreement that the gospel of Mark was written first, sometime around A.D. 55-65, by John Mark, a relative of Barnabas who accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey. The primary audience was Christians

living in Rome at the time. The book of Matthew was written by a Jewish tax collector Levi (Matthew) around A.D. 60-65 and is addressed primarily to Jews as Matthew spends a lot of time emphasizing prophecy being fulfilled in Jesus. Luke was written by a physician (Luke) and was written especially for Gentiles around A.D. 60. Luke was a Greek and a Gentile Christian who also wrote the book of Acts as a part 1/part 2 story. The gospel of John was written much later around A.D. 85-90 by the Apostle John and his primary audience was new Christians and seekers.

So here we have the same miracle portrayed in 4 texts written over a span of 35 years by authors from very different walks of life. When we put the composite story together, we can get a good picture of the events of the day. Jesus took his disciples away for some quiet time and rest. The disciples had just finished the task of burying John the

Baptist and were giving an update to Jesus who invites them to, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” Jesus knew they needed time to recharge and unwind just as we do. As they left by boat the people recognized them and followed on foot. When they landed and Jesus saw the crowds, he described them as sheep without a shepherd. According to Mark, Jesus began to teach them. Matthew highlights that Jesus took pity on the crowd and began to heal their sick. Luke notes that Jesus did both and John does not mention either the teaching or healing of the crowd. Yet when the actual feeding of the crowd takes place, all four sources are in fair agreement. Anyone who has interviewed witnesses knows how rare that can be.

Recall that Jesus had attempted to draw his disciples away for a period of solitude. Yet when they landed on

shore, a crowd had gathered and each person was bringing specific needs. Jesus could have easily sent the crowd away or gotten back in the boat and gone further up shore to get away. But what does Jesus do? He has compassion on the crowd and begins to meet their needs, both physically and spiritually. Many were there only to be healed, but Jesus spent time teaching as well to meet their spiritual needs.

At times we can't see past the physical needs, but God knows our spiritual needs and is ready to exceed our expectations on every level.

There are two important times of day in Jewish custom. The first is around 3 PM (dinnertime) and the second is sundown. When the time of 3 PM drew near, the disciples start to get a little antsy. Anyone who has ever traveled with children can recognize the time when the kids start getting restless as mealtime approaches. It seems

every exit from that point on hosts a Golden Arches that every child can spot a mile away! The disciples could not see beyond the physical problem presenting itself – a growing crowd of well over 5,000 people (note the scripture says 5,000 men with women and children so the true number was probably closer to 15-20,000). They had no food and the 3 PM hour was approaching. In John's gospel, Jesus asks Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" Now why would Jesus single out Philip? Probably because the nearest town of Bethsaida was about 9 miles away and Philip was from that town. Philip, like the other disciples, could only see the practical – it would take 8 months wages to buy enough to feed this crowd. The task is overwhelming – impossible by earthly standards. But when we are standing in the presence of Jesus, nothing is impossible.

In came Andrew, Peter's brother. I like Andrew. Andrew saw the problem. Andrew scouted for a way to solve the problem. Even when things seemed hopeless, Andrew brings what little they have to Jesus. Andrew had found a boy with 5 small barley loaves and 2 fish. Had they brought nothing, I wonder what would have happened. But they brought what they had to Jesus. The message to us seems to be this – as put by Rev. Charles Linquist Jr., you bring the bread, let God supply the miracle.

Sometimes we as individuals may feel like the 5 barley loaves and 2 fish among the crowd of hungry people. There are so many ways to bring the love of Jesus to the masses that we may feel insignificant. We may feel it is not worth the effort, but we are in the presence of God. All things are possible with God, but we have to bring the bread. Andrew brought what he found to Jesus even

though he questioned the value of such a small amount. I think deep down perhaps Andrew may have been the only disciple to remember all the miracles of healing Jesus had performed all day long. We may look at the disciples with a critical eye, wondering why they couldn't believe in spite of being in the presence of the son of God. Yet sometimes we too have trouble seeing the obvious.

The scriptures state that Jesus instructed the disciples to have the people sit down in groups of 50 or 100. Why, I wonder? I assume it was to organize the crowd in some way, perhaps to keep folks from going off in a panic. I'm thinking there must have been some trust instilled in the crowd as they watched and waited for Jesus to take care of them. So approximately 15,000 people sat down and waited. Let us bring the bread-let God supply the miracle.

Once the crowd was seated, Jesus took the bread and fish and gave thanks to God. How important that is – Jesus set an example for us to be thankful for what we have.

Jesus didn't ask God for more food, or request a smorgasbord of options for the crowd. God supplied what they needed. I'm sure there were folks in the crowd that would have preferred something else to eat, but their needs were met.

I picture the distribution similar to a scene from Mary Poppins with her magic carpet bag. She would set the normal sized bag on the table and pull out a tall hat stand, a full sized mirror and various other things. When the children would look into the bag it appeared to be empty.

I'm thinking Jesus divided the bread and fish among the 12 disciples and each was carrying a basket of a sort. As they began to distribute the food, each time they reached into the

basket there was more to give. You bring the bread – let God supply the miracle. “Everyone was fed and they were satisfied.” God just doesn’t meet our needs – He exceeds our expectations. 15,000 people were satisfied and there were 12 baskets full of leftovers – one for each doubting disciple.

There was a man that was doing some soul-searching in prayer. He asked God to use him somehow and reveal a sign that his prayer was answered. Suddenly, the man had the strangest feeling that God was telling him to go and buy a gallon of milk. How bizarre, yet the feeling was so strong the man stopped at the next convenience store and bought the milk. He then received a clear message of an address that was just around the block. At this point the man started to doubt this was God – how ridiculous. Yet the man found himself with the gallon of milk standing in front

of a stranger's door. He turned to leave at least 3 times but the feeling and message were too strong – deliver this milk to the people at this address. When the man finally knocked on the door, a father answered, saw the man with the gallon of milk and called for his wife. With an exchange of stories the couple explained that they had no milk for their baby and were praying to God for help. They didn't pray for a happy meal or a basketful of treats, they prayed for what they needed and God delivered. The man had received his sign from God and a family was given what they needed when they needed it.

What do we need from God? Are we in need of healing, comfort, spiritual renewal? As we come together for our time of communion, let us bring our needs and concerns to God. We may feel our situation is too trivial, that there are greater needs for God to address. Jesus said,

“Let not your heart be troubled. If you believe in God, believe also in me.” Bring your cares, problems, and hurts to God and leave them there. Take up the challenge – you bring the bread, let God supply the miracle. Amen.