

Rev. Janet Doyle
Elmer Presbyterian Church
5th Sunday in Lent
April 3, 2022
Scripture: John 6: 1-14

Sermon: The Miracle of Leftovers

It is always fun to have people over for dinner or to have a party for some special occasion, but I am always concerned about having enough food. Usually, I have enough and even have leftovers. My husband always says, "One of the benefits of having a party are the leftovers." Now, we have never had a party for over 5000 people, but Jesus did.

Do you believe in miracles from God? Jesus performed miracles and we read about them in our scriptures. Many were healed and many followed Jesus because they witnessed a miracle, or they were the miracle themselves. Jesus walked on water and calmed storming waters at a moment's notice.

Today we are looking at the Miracle of the Loaves and the Fish and the 12 baskets of leftovers. It is the only miracle that is reported in each of the four gospels. This miracle story shares a direct line to an Old Testament miracle of God telling Moses that he will feed the Hebrew people with manna and quail daily. That was also a miracle but Jesus, our Savior, who has come from Heaven, God with us, was a miracle worker and people knew it.

The story is plain. Jesus and the Twelve Disciples were trying to find a quiet place to rest and take a break, but people kept following him because of his miraculous signs. Jesus is faced with thousands of hungry people who have followed him to hear his teaching and to see the miracles and to be a miracle. The disciples were like you and me. They were ready to send the people away. They were tired and not wanting to have to do anymore for anyone.

Jesus turned to Philip and asked, "Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?" It was getting late in the day, and no one had food, or so

they thought. Jesus was testing Philip, for he already knew what he was going to do.

Philip replied, “Even if we worked for months, we wouldn’t have enough money to feed them!” Philip forgot all the miracles he had just witnessed with his own eyes that Jesus had done. It wasn’t going to take money to feed the people it was going to take faith and belief in the one who came to give life abundantly. Usually, the answer to our problems are right in front of us, and that day the disciples realized that it took the eyes of faith to change what seemed ordinary into extraordinary and what seemed impossible to be possible.

The disciples were like you and me. They were blind to the miracles that Jesus could do until Jesus taught them to see problems as opportunities.

Andrew spoke up and said, “There’s a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?”

All Jesus said to his disciples was, “Tell everyone to sit down.” Jesus was the Host, and he was feeding his guests. Everyone was welcome and no one was going to be turned away. Jesus never would turn anyone away. Jesus was feeding the people not only food for their hungry bodies but also food for their hungry soul.

Aren’t we like all those thousands of people, hungry to be with Jesus and hungry for a miracle and hungry to be in his presence? Our souls are hungry, and Jesus knows it. Jesus tells us to come and sit and rest in his presence, and he will provide for our needs if we trust in him. Jesus had compassion on the people who had great needs. Jesus made time for all the people to eat. He wasn’t thinking of his own needs but the needs of those around him.

Jesus talks to the little boy who has the lunch and thanks him for sharing with everyone. I’m sure the little boy’s mouth was wide when he saw what was happening to his small lunch of five loaves and two fish.

Jesus took the bread and looked up, he gave thanks, he blessed it, broke the bread and he gave it to his disciples to distribute. Then he did the same with the fish.

It was the Twelve Disciples that shared the food with all the people. It was their job to make sure everyone had enough and was full. The disciples were given the opportunity and privilege to participate in a great miracle. The little boy, also, was open to sharing his lunch and watching a miracle happen. He placed his lunch in Jesus' hands. The little boy didn't hold back; he gave Jesus what he had, and Jesus used it for good to bless the thousands there that day.

In the story from the Old Testament of the manna, there were never any leftovers. God said, "Just gather one day's ration," and if they tried to gather more than one day's ration of bread from heaven, it would spoil. There were no leftovers of manna. You got only what you needed but not with Jesus. After feeding the 5,000 plus with only 5 loaves and 2 fish, Jesus had twelve baskets of leftovers. That also is a miracle. More food than was needed or so it seems.

Have you ever sent home leftovers with your guests so they can enjoy food for the next day or two? We usually do and many people feel blessed with the leftovers. We don't know what happened with the twelve baskets of leftovers Jesus had, but I'm sure they weren't wasted. He probably sent leftovers home with some there so they would continue to be blessed. The twelve baskets of leftovers kept blessing. Jesus loves us abundantly when we tell him our needs and believe. Even when what we offer to God seems so small and inadequate, through Christ, it is enough. He makes it more than enough.

Jesus, miracle worker, took what he had and offered it before God. He gave thanks, blessed it and broke it. Does that sound familiar? The last night when he was with his disciples, he took bread and gave thanks, blessed it and broke it and gave it to his disciples, it was the Last Supper. And it was the very picture of what He was willing to endure on our behalf—the brokenness of the cross and the blessing and power of the Resurrection.

Ephesians 3:20 says, "He is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us."

In this miracle Jesus, has offered us a pattern of how we may approach those things that are too much, too big, or too difficult for us.

We all need to start with the most important thing. We give thanks, and we pray. We do that here every week when we meet for worship. We pray for the world, for its needs, for His church, we pray for those persecuted for their faith, we pray for each other and for those in need. We give thanks.

Once a month we come together and sit down at his table and we bless the bread and cup, give thanks and we break the bread in remembrance of the sacrifice of Jesus and the miracle of Good Friday turning into Resurrection Sunday.

The next step for us is to feed the people, just like the twelve disciples did that day with the boy's lunch. We are called to feed people with the love and knowledge of Jesus. Feed God's people until they are satisfied, and we have a miracle of leftovers. With enough knowledge and with enough love of Jesus, what seems impossible becomes possible one hungry person at a time. Sometimes we don't know the outcome of our feeding, but we know we are called to feed as his disciples. Because Jesus tells us to trust in him and to have faith, we know in the end all things work together for the good.

What can we do to make a difference in the world with all the needs in the world and right now in Ukraine? First pray and offer up to God what we can. We can help feed physically by giving to the agencies who are helping to distribute food and supplies to the refuges and help feed spiritually by giving to Christian agencies that help show them and teach them about the love of Jesus.

Jesus said, in Luke 4:18-19 fulfilling the prophecy of the Messiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come." Jesus came to set us free from sin and death.

Later in Chapter 6 of John's Gospel, Jesus is again followed by a crowd, and he says to them, "I tell you the truth, you want to be with me because I fed you, not because you understood the miraculous signs. But don't be so concerned about perishable things like food. Spend your energy seeking the eternal life that the Son of Man can give you."

In verse 33 Jesus says, “The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” The crowd said, “Sir, give us that bread every day.” Jesus replied, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Do you believe in miracles? Believe in our God of miracles. Believe that what doesn't look like enough will become baskets of leftovers. Believe that the bread of life will feed you and believe that you will be a part of the miracle for those around you that are hungry for the Bread of Life.

Today, offer up to Jesus what you have in your hands just like the little boy with the lunch. Offer Jesus your brokenness, your pain, all your losses and inadequacies and doubts and he will turn them into miracles of blessings.

Come to the Lord's Table today and know that he will feed you until your emptiness is filled and what seems impossible will become possible.

Remember even leftovers can be a miracle!