

Introduction:

- A. You may be familiar with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount—three chapters of his teaching in Matthew. Jesus had another famous sermon on the mount, but here's the thing: almost none of Jesus' words are recorded. It was very hard to take sermon notes! All four gospels tell this story, but with different emphases. For the first of our two angles this morning turn to **John 6**.
- B. **John 6:1-3...** Jesus and his disciples were actually trying to get away from the crowds. Mark records that Jesus had said to his disciples, "*Come with me to a quiet place and get some rest.*" So they went to the quiet eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. But there was no rest for the weary.

V.4, "*The Jewish Passover was near.*" The greatest of the Jewish feasts with its lamb and *unleavened bread*.

Vv.5-13... See what I mean. It was a sermon on the mount, but there's almost no sermon words recorded. **I suppose that's why no one understood it at first.**

I. "WHERE SHALL WE BUY BREAD FOR ALL THESE PEOPLE TO EAT?" (6:1-13)

- A. Note that question of Jesus in v.5. What's he asking? "Where shall we buy bread?" And you noticed, of course, that it's a set-up. "*He already had in mind what he was going to do.*"

His disciples actually give him two answers. Philip says, basically, "*No way we could afford to buy even a bite for all these people.*" But that wasn't what Jesus asked. Then Andrew says, "*Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but **how far will they go among so many?***" He doesn't really answer Jesus' question either.

- B. John tells us that Jesus already had a plan. His plan was to feed all those people *all they could eat* with a ridiculously small amount of food. This wasn't food Jesus created out of nothing—*ex nihilo*. Those first five loaves and two fish just kept multiplying under his touch.

The people were hungry but they weren't starving. They could have gone home. **None of the crowd asked or expected Jesus to feed them. But when he did, none of them realized that they'd just eaten his sermon!**

- C. The one thing in this story that the crowd hears Jesus' speak is thanks to God for the food. **V.11**, "*Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted.*" A few verses later, **v.23** refers to "*the place where the people and eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks.*" That was the turning point of this story. Giving thanks to the Father was Jesus' act of faith. That was when the miracle—the *sign*—began.

V.13 says that afterwards the disciples "*filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over.*" All that food *came from* the boy's lunch. I've heard of hostesses who could make a little food go a long way, but this is crazy!

- C. Then there is that last detail—the 12 baskets of leftovers, carefully collected. Twelve. What happened to those baskets isn't really important. It's that there were all those leftovers. If Jesus could multiply food, he could certainly have had the meal come out even. No leftovers. Unlike most cooks I know, he didn't over-prepare. So why the 12 extra basketsful? Hmm. **Enough for every disciple to take one.** In sermon school we call that an inductive conclusion; kind of a "what do you make of that?"

Now we're going to skip some verses that detail how Jesus and his disciples slip away from the crowd and return to the other side of the lake. When the crowd figures out they're gone many of them pursued Jesus. So this next exchange happens the next day.

Vv.25-26... These folks had one thing on their minds: food.

They figured out that if Jesus could feed them that easily once, why not do it all the time. And if he would give them their daily bread *daily* they wouldn't have to work so hard or ever worry about where their next meal was going to come from. This could be their jackpot! **But now it was time for Jesus to interpret the sermon they'd eaten the day before.**

II. THE FEEDING OF THE 5000 IS GOD'S SIGN THAT JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE (6:25-36)

- A. **V.27...** These people *worked* for their daily bread. They didn't take for granted that they'd have food tomorrow. But Jesus puts two striking thoughts before them. 1) They'd be wise to focus their efforts on food that wouldn't spoil and would give them eternal life. 2) He—the Son of Man—would give it to them. They could count on that because God the Father had put his seal of approval upon Jesus.
- B. **V.28-29...** That's strange "work," isn't it? "*Believe in the one he has sent.*" What's 'work' about that? Good point! "*Food that endures to eternal life*" requires no more strenuous work than *believing in the one God has sent.* Isn't that better than having fresh barley loaves every day?!
- C. They understood what Jesus was saying but now they want a sign that he really has God's approval, that he is the Messiah: v.30-31... I'm sure you see the irony of that. They were still digesting the bread and fish Jesus had given them yesterday, break that simply multiplied out of one small lunch when Jesus gave thanks to God. But it never occurred to them that they had witnessed—actually,

eaten—one of Jesus’ greatest signs. But since bread was on their minds, they say, “*Moses gave us manna that fell from heaven. Why don’t you do that? That’s the kind of sign we need to see.*” Ai-yi-yi!

D. **Vv.32-36...** Jesus says, *First of all, Moses didn’t give you manna; God did. Secondly, my Father has already given you truer heavenly bread than manna, bread “that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”* They were hoping they’d see those manna flakes drifting from the sky as the Israelites had in the wilderness—heaven-sent bread. They’d always wondered what manna tasted like. But the true Bread of Life had been born in Bethlehem and now stood before them, the very Son of God, who could feed them forever.

E. “But... you have seen me and still you do not believe.” They *could* believe that Jesus could feed them bread every day for the rest of their lives but they *wouldn’t* believe that he could satisfy their souls forever.

I think that was because they didn’t think much of their souls. They didn’t know how famished their hearts were, and they didn’t much care. **John Bunyan**, author of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, wrote, “*The soul is such a thing, so rich and valuable in its nature, that scarce one in twenty thousand counts of it as they should.*” Like so many people around us—even like us, sometimes—they had no appetite for real life—the life Jesus offers, straight from heaven.

Illus.: Do you remember when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by the devil. He fasted for 40 days and the devil pushed him to turn the stones to bread. Jesus replied, “*It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’*”

In Dostoevsky's great novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, one brother, the skeptic Ivan, tells a story of the Grand Inquisitor to his brother, Alyosha, who is a novice monk. In it, the Devil comes to Jesus a second time, just as he did in the wilderness, this time as the Grand Inquisitor during the brutal Spanish Inquisition, once again tempting Jesus to turn stones to bread. *"Turn them into bread, and mankind will run after You like a flock of sheep, grateful and obedient, though for ever trembling, lest You withdraw Your hand and deny them Your bread... You promised them the bread of Heaven, but...can it compare with earthly bread in the eyes of the weak, ever sinful and ignoble race of man?... You rejected the one infallible banner which was offered You to make all men bow down to You alone—the banner of earthly bread; and You have rejected it for the sake of freedom and the bread of Heaven."*

Of course, he was right. Jesus is the Bread of Heaven. Like the **unleavened bread at the Passover**, he is food for the journey to our homeland. Like **manna** in the wilderness, Jesus is the only food that brings life to our hearts. Like the **loaves in the tabernacle**, he is the meal at the center of our fellowship with God. He is the **very word of God** upon which God's people must live. As with the **bread in the Communion** His body, broken for us, unifies us as we each and all share this great feast of grace.

Apart from the story of Jesus' last week and his resurrection, this is the only story found in all four gospels, which is an indication of what an important sign and sermon it is. But it is interesting that John's telling has a somewhat different emphasis than the other three. Turn with me now to **Mark 6:35-37** to look at one difference... Notice how prominent the disciples are in **vv.41-43...**

III. IN FEEDING THE HEARTS OF THE HUNGRY, JESUS IS IN PRODUCTION. WE ARE IN DISTRIBUTION.

A. There may have been as many as 20,000 people sitting on that mountainside and Jesus looks at his 12 empty-handed disciples and said, “*You give them something to eat.*” It is **Jesus’ Great Commission on a caterer’s card.** Here’s how it happens for us.

- A guy at work, trying to sound nonchalant, tells you that he and his wife are getting a divorce. Your heart goes out to him, but you think, “*I’m no marriage counselor.*”
- A kid at school drops his guard just long enough for you to see how desperately lonely he is. And you feel badly for him, but you think, “*I don’t have the emotional energy to be this guy’s friend.*”
- Your friend tells you how depressed she’s been lately. And you think, “*I wonder if she’s thought of taking an antidepressant.*”
- A college buddy says he’s planning to party this weekend because there’s nothing else to do. And you think, “*What an empty life!*”
- You strike up a conversation with someone only to have them spill some desperate story—a wayward kid, financial ruin, a dying parent.
- Or for a moment they drop the masks of anger, or cynicism, or humor, and you see how hungry they are. **And Jesus whispers to you, “*You give them something to eat.*”** And you look at Jesus as incredulously as the disciples did.

B. The disciples said in v.37, “*Meeting this need would take eight months’ wages.*” We say the same kinds of things. We check our résumé: “*Nope, not qualified to deal with*

that!” We get out our calculators: Tap, tap, tap; subtotal; divide by 5000. “*Sorry, can’t be done.*” We pull out our calendars. “*Yikes. I’m completely booked up. Must be someone else for you.*” **But Jesus says, “You give them something to eat.”**

- C. When Jesus puts hungry people in our path he expects us to feed them, even though we have nothing of our own to offer. If we’re going to be with Jesus, we are most certainly going to be running into people with deep spiritual hunger because he always goes looking for them. Jesus says, “***Give me what you have and I’ll give them what they hunger for.***”
- D. We talk often about three ways of doing that: **Prayer, Care, Share.** We pray for them, show the compassion of Jesus, and share the Good News.
- E. How did the disciples feed all those people? They kept going back to Jesus. Remember this: Jesus is in production; we’re in distribution. **Alexander Maclaren** wrote, “*The pieces grew under his touch, and the disciples always found his hands full when they came back with their own empty.*” As you listen to the person you’re with, you whisper a silent prayer, “*Lord, what shall I feed them?*” and you just do or say what he prompts you to do. It will always be loving. If a **verse** comes to mind, share it. If a **hug** seems the thing, give a hug. If Christ brings no words to mind, **listen.** There are few gifts more precious than listening. If you sense you need to be **blunt**, then do it in love. Jesus told his disciples that if they were hauled into court for being his disciple the Spirit would give them words to say right there on the spot. He’ll do the same in these situations. **Give them what you have and Jesus will give them what they hunger for.**
- F. Illus.: I preached on this text over 13 years ago and I discovered in my notes a story I’ve completely forgotten. I quote myself.

“This week I visited with a hungry man over lunch. His heart is so hungry and he wanted to talk about spiritual food. It was an amazing meeting. He is so thoughtful and sincere. I know that several people had prayed for our time because as I listened and spoke it was uncanny how God brought the right answers and questions to my mind. The level at which we connected was amazing. At one point he said, *‘I feel like when I talk to you I’m talking to Jesus.’* And another time, *‘I think God may have brought me 4000 miles just for this conversation.’* When we parted, he was almost ready to eat the Bread of Life.”

I wonder what happened next.

Jesus is the Bread of Life and Jesus said to his disciples, “*You give them something to eat.*”