

John 6:1-15

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John 6:1 Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias),² and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick.³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples.⁴ The Jewish Passover Feast was near.

⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?”⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

⁷ Philip answered him, “Eight months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”

⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up,⁹ “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

¹⁰ Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them.¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.”¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

¹⁴ After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.”¹⁵ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

Dear Friends in Christ,

SATISFIED?

If you are planning to go to an all-you-can-eat dinner buffet, here is the question: Is it better to starve yourself for lunch, or to eat a normal meal? Maybe not all of us have asked that question, but some of us think along those lines.

There was a mother of six, a while ago, who laughing, said that whenever she puts a meal on the table, she can see all six of her children doing the math. That much pizza, divided by eight (six children and two parents)—How many pieces do I get? Twelve hamburgers? Is that 1.5 hamburgers each, or do some get two and others get one. One quart of milk left? How much can I put on my Lucky Charms so that everyone will get some milk for their Lucky Charms. If you are one of six children, you might be the sort of person who asks, “Before we go to the all-you-can-eat-buffet, should I starve myself or should I eat a normal lunch so I can get the most food possible?”

I. Leave the worry behind

A teenager in a large family probably wishes he or she had more food more often. What do you wish you had more of? More money to feed the kids? More time to do stuff with the family? Better

clothes to not feel un-cool around schoolmates? More intelligence to get better grades, better scholarships, a better job?

Jesus never thought that way. Jesus was always focused on what other people needed. That's what we find Jesus doing in John chapter six. ***“When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?’*** (5). Jesus thinks, “These people will need some food.” He doesn't think about how these people interrupted his lessons with the disciples. He doesn't think about how unreasonable it is that these people are chasing after him in remote areas without any food, and he is going to have to sort out their problems. He sees their need and considers it.

Jesus made a plan. But even though Jesus had a plan, he still asked his disciples, ***“Where shall we buy bread for these people?”*** Well, if you know the story, you say, “That really wasn't a fair question to ask. How could the disciples know the answer?” Sometimes good teachers do that. They sometimes ask questions the students can't possibly answer to get students looking in the right direction. In fact, we would say the teacher isn't doing her job if she doesn't ask those questions once in a while.

Jesus asked the question, “These thousands, how are we going to feed them?” One of his disciples, Philip, immediately furrowed his brow, concentrated and started doing mental math. Maybe he grew up in a large family and was used to looking at lots of people with not much food – I don't know. “Let's see. We got about 5,000 men here and a good number of women and children too. Figure six or seven thousand, multiply that by—what is the going rate for bread? Hmm. \$1,000, \$2,000, \$5,000, \$10,000, Still not enough!” He does the math and comes up with this answer, ***“Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”*** And I think Jesus sort of looks at him and says with his eyes, “Philip, I didn't ask how we can't feed these people. How can we feed them?” I have great sympathy for Philip. I like math. But math... Don't we have that phrase in English, “Cold, hard numbers.” That is what was happening to Philip. The cold, hard numbers were getting to him. “It just isn't possible, Jesus.”

If you don't handle cold hard numbers carefully, they do that to you. All your problems are arithmetic that you have to solve. There is no room for God when you reduce life to cold, hard numbers. And that leads to worry.

Here is a sin that we don't talk about much, worry. Oh, we know it is unhealthy. But is it really sin? Jesus said, *“I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink... Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”* (Mt 6:25,27). Worry is every bit as bad as arrogance. Both, in different ways, are a lack of faith in God. Arrogance says, “I don't need God” and worry says, “I don't think God will help me.” Worry says that we believe that it is up to ourselves to make it through the trials of this life. Worry says, “I don't trust that God will help me.” That is why when Jesus more than once called worriers, *“You of little faith.”* (Matthew 6:30; 8:26; 14:31) Worry is sin.

You parents. How would you feel if you say you will do something for your kids, but they say, “I doubt it”? We would be hurt, but even take it as disrespect. How do you feel when you say you are going to help out your friend and the friend says, “Yah, right!” It cuts to the heart.

Worry is that same thing to God. When we worry, we say that we don't trust all that God will take care of us. Worry is a sin to repent of. It is also a sinful habit to avoid. When we feel worry creeping up on us, we need to avoid it as much as we need to avoid temptations to anger, dishonesty, lust, hatred or any other sin. Worry needs to be combatted. How? Keep watching.

II. Bring your worries to Jesus

Philip wasn't the only disciple in our reading. The disciple Andrew was there too. I love watching Andrew. We don't see a lot of Andrew in the Gospels. If you were in a drama production of the life of

Jesus according to the Bible, and if you were nervous about memorizing lines, Andrew is the character for you. He only has three or four lines recorded in the entire Bible. So you might think that we really don't know much about him, but we sort of do.

Here is what we do know about Andrew. Andrew was always bringing things to Jesus. The first time Andrew saw Jesus, he went and found his brother and brought him to the Messiah. Another time some Greeks were wanting to talk to Jesus. They first went to the disciple Philip. Philip got flustered and didn't know what to do – you know, the Jew-Gentile thing, and the protocol for rabbis and all that – so Philip asked Andrew what he thought and Andrew just said, “Who cares? I don't know what to do with them either, but Jesus will!” and he took them to Jesus.

And then we have this lesson. Jesus tells the disciples to feed thousands of people. Philip does the math and says, “Nope. Can't be done.” But here is Andrew, just like always, bringing stuff to Jesus. Jesus said they needed food for 5,000 people, so Andrew brings him what he can find: five small loaves of barley bread. (There are jokes about barley bread in ancient literature. In modern days the jokes would go something like: “I am starving to death. I need some food.” “Here is some barley bread.” “No. I said I needed food.” Popular opinion was that barley was for animals.) So Andrew brings a little bit of icky barley bread and two fish so small they weren't even keepers and says “Here you go Jesus.” And the other eleven disciples roll their eyes and smile at each other and think, “Yah, Andrew, that's a good answer.” But you see what Andrew is doing here? He just says, “You asked for it, and Jesus, I know that when you ask for something that's what you want. I trust you.” I don't think Andrew knew what Jesus was going to do. He just trusted Jesus like a small child trusts a trustworthy parent.

That is the way to combat worry. Take it to Jesus. Jesus invited, “*Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest*” (Matthew 11:28). Jesus takes the burden of worry off your shoulders. First of all, he forgives you. Then he assures you that he, the almighty God, will care for you.

III. He will satisfy us for eternity

Finally, Jesus shows us why Andrew's approach, rather than Philip's approach, is the right approach.

“Jesus said, ‘Have the people sit down...’ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted.” Did you get those last words? ***“As much as they wanted.”*** It was the all-you-can-eat buffet for a small stadium of people. Jesus tested the disciples. Now he shows them the answer. Jesus can meet all our needs. That is why we should trust him. Once in a great while, God does what he does in this reading. He answers our needs in a way that is inexplicable. And if you have ever seen that miraculous answer to your prayers—and I know many of you have a small number of times in your lives—thank God for it.

Now I do need to say this: most of the time God does not answer our prayers with what we would call miracles. In fact, the very next day, when people were again asking Jesus for food, he flat out refused.

It is a reminder of the truth that our children learn in Catechism class, Based on the clear teachings of the Bible, we know that God usually provides for us by natural means. He causes the plants of nature to grow. He blesses us with strength and intelligence to work. He uses the generosity of other people to provide for us. And sometimes, he can even perform miracles. But our God is a hidden God who usually clothes himself in the processes of nature.

When Jesus fed those 5,000 men, he was doing far more than merely meeting their need for food. He was teaching something that some of them did understand. ***“After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, ‘Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world’”***

(John 6:14). While this reading is a valuable lesson in God's care for us, it is also a sign that God does something much greater than keep us alive, on average, 78.8 years. Jesus could make lots of bread. But he himself is, as he called himself, the Bread of Life. This miracle is a sign that he is greater than the greatest chef in the history of the world—oh, how trivial a distinction by comparison—he is the Savior of the world. He is the one through whose life and death, all of the sin of that crowd of 5,000 and this smaller crowd of 70 or 80, and everyone else's sin has been removed. And now, he bids us lay aside all of life's anxiety and worry over to him. Watching those 5,000 plus walking away satisfied from that all-you-can-eat buffet on the Galilean mountainside, we realize the truth of this Bible wisdom: "*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*" (1 Peter 5:7). Amen.