

**August 2, 2020**

This miracle story, the feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle story that appears in all four gospels. Matthew and Mark even include a second story where Jesus feeds an additional four thousand. As far as the gospel writers are concerned, all this feeding and eating and large numbers are a sign of the Kingdom.

Today I would like to spend a little time reflecting on what is it about this miracle that is so compelling...

During the time of Jesus food was not as prevalent as it is in our culture. Food insecurity was a major problem. Imagine... there were no freezers or refrigerators, no chemical preservatives or sterile packaging, no grocery stores, poor distribution...

They used methods of drying, salting and fermenting... But as you can imagine, very limited... So, food was managed very carefully. And you took care of yourself and your loved ones first... And if had perishable surplus, you would try to sell it... Better than letting it go bad. So, generally speaking, food was a precious commodity.

So, this is the context... And you have a large group of people... Many of them, probably had some food with them, tucked away for the walk home... And probably not too eager to let anyone know they had it, let alone share it! The only food that the disciples could scrounge up is five loaves and two fish.

Jesus has the people sit on the grass, he blessed and broke those five loaves and two fishes, gave it to the disciples to distribute, and magically over five thousand people eat their fill, and there are twelve baskets of leftovers!

There is a spiritual principle happening here... Think about love, think about forgiveness, imagine how vast and wide God's love and forgiveness is... It's as far as east is from the

west... Through the compassion of Jesus, hearts were opened and sharing happened, food miraculously appeared!

Quick story... About five years ago, another pastor and I had supper at the Eagles club in Austin. It was a Wednesday evening during the summer, we led a bible study in the afternoon, and thought it would be fun to go out to eat... We knew we'd see a couple of parishioners there... They were always inviting us...

When we walked in, we noticed a long table of about thirty! I was a little surprised! I thought there might be a few church people, but not that many! It didn't take long for someone to buy me a beer! So, it was all good...

As we sat there yakking, I started to notice things... We were all pretty much having the same conversation we would in church. Everyone was sitting together, listening to one other, caring for each other.

Someone shared with me about a health concern. Someone else shared with me about a family concern. People were giving each other a hard time, kidding, and joking and laughing.

It was fellowship, pure and simple—at the Eagle's Club... Church is all about being a people... whenever and wherever we gather.

So, there we were eating hamburgers, fries and tenderloins and having a great old time, and suddenly cake starts getting passed around. And I don't know where the cake is coming from... And goodness gracious, every plate had about five different kinds. Chocolate, pineapple, cinnamon... you name it.

I was a little confused, and must have looked puzzled, because someone said, "It's the Eagles club, they don't do dessert, and they don't care if you bring your own."

Then I looked down at the end of the long table, and it was absolutely heaping full of cake! Cake pans and plates of brownies everywhere! Who'd a thunk! So, I thought I'd better start eating!

Someone who was just at the bible study said, "hey, this is just like the feeding of the five thousand." And indeed, yes it was... My eyes were opened, and I thought about the love in that room... the abundance of cake and the abundance of caring. And I thought to myself, this is a sign of the kingdom. Right here...

And believe me, it happens a lot more frequently than we typically think...

Indeed, some of my fondest memories at Cross of Christ and Cannon River have to do with food! Think about all the pot lucks we've had!

We have Christmas potlucks, community potlucks, next Saturday we were planning to have a pot-luck at Cannon River, but thought better of it because of the virus...

And let's not forget about the funeral lunches, how many of those have been served through the years? And Welca Salad Luncheons, and Taste of Welch, and remember the strawberry festival?

One of my personal favorite memories is decorating for Christmas and Alvie's oyster stew! Remember that? Every time we get together and eat, we are sharing from our abundance and being a sign of God's love.

And it's not only *our* eating together, we're active with feed my starving children, we're always collecting food and giving money for the food shelves...

Can you imagine all the meals our members have shared together? Kind of miraculous when you think about it... How many people would you guess have been fed through our two

congregations over 150 years? You know what; we don't keep track of that number, because frankly we do it because it's who we are, and *whose* we are.

But what would you think, maybe four thousand? Maybe five thousand? Who knows? The Gospel writers are absolutely correct, it is a big number!

It's always God's work and our hands, and when you think about it, we really are a miraculous people. God's love has been poured into our hearts, and so we love one another... I believe it because I've seen it... Like the sign says; "Love God, Love People, Simple..."

Amen...