

Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 6, 2005

John 6:1-15

Sermon by Pastor Paul Janke

Leave It to Jesus

1. To recognize the need
2. To provide the solution

NIV **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.*

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

What do you do with folks who unexpectedly show up at your house at dinner time? Do you tell them you're just about to sit down to dinner and point them in the direction of the nearest McDonald's? That's about what some of the disciples suggested. According to Matthew's Gospel, these disciples told Jesus, "**Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.**" (Matt. 14:15) Or maybe you look at the unexpected crew standing at your door and start toting up the cost of feeding them all. That was Philip's reaction: "**Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite.**" Or do you invite them in, then glance at the meager

portions you've prepared and begin worrying that there won't be enough? That was Andrew. **"Here is a small boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"**

The reaction of the disciples is understandable, though, isn't it? In that whole crowd of people they had just one small boy who'd thought to bring a lunch, but no amount of stretching that those five small loaves and two small fish was going to feed such a crowd. But the disciples weren't completely without resources. They had Jesus. They had already witnessed his miracle-working powers on numerous occasions, yet it didn't occur to them to think that this man who turned water into wine at the wedding at Cana could also find a way to feed the crowd standing before them. Through this experience, though, the disciples learned (again) to **Leave It to Jesus**. And this morning, as we re-examine this familiar account, we, too, can learn again to **Leave it to Jesus**, (1) to recognize the need, and (2) to provide the solution.

1. To recognize the need

The days were coming when Jesus would be left alone to face the Sanhedrin, left alone to stand before Pontius Pilate, and abandoned by his disciples to endure crucifixion. But on this day Jesus was not alone. A large crowd, tantalized by the miraculous signs Jesus had performed on the sick, had followed the Savior to a remote place on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus immediately recognized their need. The crowd was large. The location was remote. The hour was late. Jesus recognized that these people needed to be fed.

That's the kind of Lord we have. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, **"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them."** (Matt. 6:31-32) As it is with the Father, so it is with the Son. Jesus knows our needs better than we know them ourselves. In fact, Jesus knows our needs before we know them ourselves. Like some super-efficient butler who has developed an uncanny ability to anticipate the needs of his employer, so Jesus perfectly anticipates our needs. The LORD says in Isaiah 65, **"Before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear."** (Is. 65:24) Except that Jesus is not a butler; he's the Lord of the universe. And yet he's so perfectly acquainted with his children—with *us*—that he perfectly knows and anticipates our every need.

The disciple Philip had apparently not yet come that far in his appreciation of Jesus. John tells us that Jesus already had in mind what he was going to do, but he put a question to Philip to test him. *"Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"* Philip could see only the staggering cost. The wages of two-thirds of a year wouldn't buy even a bite for each one. He was at a loss.

We've been where Philip was, haven't we? I don't mean that Jesus is standing there asking us, "So, what do you think we should do about this?" But some big challenge comes into our lives—maybe it's family-related or employment-related. Maybe it's financial or medical. At those times isn't it true that we so often find ourselves thinking almost exclusively, "What am *I* going to do about this?" If it seems possible that we *might* do something about it, we set to work to solve it, worrying as we go. Or maybe the challenge is so overwhelming that we're immediately convinced that nothing can be done; like Philip, we're at a loss. Our sleepless nights and our acid stomach, our anxious hearts and our fretting minds, are only the symptoms of the unbelief that still resides in us. If we weren't believers who still wrestle daily with the tendency toward unbelief, we'd simply say, "My Jesus knows about this and he already has in mind what he's going to do." That's our sin. It's a sin against the very first commandment, "**You shall have no other gods.**" If we could keep that commandment, then we'd always trust that Jesus recognizes our needs.

The truth is, Jesus didn't just recognize the physical hunger of the crowd that followed in his wake. If that were so, he would have contented himself to fill their stomachs and send them back home. And he would have been nothing more than an amazingly resourceful caterer. No, more importantly, Jesus recognized their spiritual hunger. He used his miracle of the loaves and fish to move on to speaking to them about an even greater need. Later in this chapter Jesus advises, "**Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.**" (John 6:27) He proceeded to introduce himself as the bread of life and promised that those who come to him would never go hungry, but would have eternal life and would be raised up on the last day. Physical hunger we recognize. And some of us go about relieving that need every couple of hours. Spiritual hunger is different. You can be starving spiritually and not even know it. That's why Jesus, who recognizes the need, points it out to us.

Now it's one thing to recognize a need. But there are a great many needs that we can recognize full well, but have no ability to do anything about. That's not the case with Jesus. He both recognizes the need and is able to provide the solution. It's further reason to leave it to Jesus.

2. To provide the solution

The feeding of 5,000 hungry people in a remote location is a huge logistical challenge today in this age of modern transportation and technology. It was an even more staggering challenge then. Yet Jesus made short work of it. He provided a solution that was simple but sublime. He enlisted his disciples to help in having the people sit down in orderly fashion. Then he took the provisions

offered by the boy, said a table prayer, and began to pass out portions of bread and fish. Somewhere along the line, a miraculous multiplying of the loaves and fish took place. Everyone ate. Everyone had enough. And, in the end, there were twelve baskets of leftovers for the disciples to eat.

What do you think Philip and Andrew were thinking just then? The passage in today's epistle lesson comes to mind: Jesus is **“able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.”** (Eph. 3:20) Cost wasn't a factor. They didn't run out of food and they didn't have to send the crowd off to the villages to forage for food. Their expectations had been set too low. They had to be thinking not only, “How did this happen?” but also, “Who is this Jesus that he can do such things?” Jesus was raising their sights with regard to his true identity. This was a miracle on par with the LORD's provision of manna for the Israelites after they left Egypt. And John records this miracle for us so that we recognize that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. This miracle, along with all the others Jesus performed, was designed to call forth our faith, faith that Jesus is who he says he is and that he is well able to provide the solution to our needs from the simplest to the greatest.

Of course, the solution to our greatest need wouldn't be provided in a remote place on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Still less would it be provided if those people had been successful in taking Jesus by force and making him their king. It would be provided only when Jesus offered his spotless life as payment for our sins on the cross. That sacrificial act obliterated the wall of sin that separated us from God. The solution to our greatest need would be provided when the disciples realized that the garden tomb contained only strips of linen and a neatly folded burial shroud, but not the body of Jesus. Jesus had risen to life again.

In a way, we're a lot like that crowd out there on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. We have needs, urgent needs and eternal needs. Sometimes, like the disciples, we act as if Jesus either doesn't know our needs or can't do anything to provide for them. That's when miracles like the feeding of the 5000 serve to remind us to leave it to Jesus. He not only recognizes our needs, but is able to supply what we need, for this life and for all eternity. Amen.