

**+ Matthew 14:13-21 + With Jesus, There Are Always Leftovers +  
+ 11th Sunday after Pentecost + 24 August 2014 +**

It was getting late and they had a big problem on their hands. The twelve followers of Jesus found themselves surrounded by thousands of hungry people in a remote place near the Sea of Galilee. None of those people were supposed to be there. Lately the Master had been very busy with huge crowds flocking to him to be healed and to hear his teaching. He was worn out. So Jesus decided to cross the lake with his disciples to a solitary place where he could teach them privately, but it wasn't meant to be.

News traveled with lightning speed to the surrounding villages. When Jesus and his disciples pulled up on that remote shore, they found a crowd of thousands waiting for them. There were at least 5,000 men out there. Add in the women and children and they were looking at a crowd of nearly 10,000 people. What could Jesus do? He wasn't about to get back in the boat telling the people, "Go home and leave me alone!" No, the apostle Matthew, who was there with Jesus, tells us that **"he had compassion on them and healed their sick."** Jesus was so physically moved with compassion that he disregarded his own physical needs and helped them not just with their physical ailments, but their sin-sick souls. Luke tells us, **"He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God."** (9:11)

...But it was getting late and the disciples would soon have a crisis on their hands. They were out in the middle of nowhere with a crowd of thousands, who were getting hungry. No one had thought to bring any food except for a young man whose mother sent along **"five loaves of bread and two fish"**. That would barely feed one adult disciple, let alone this crowd of thousands.

What were the disciples going to do? Their concern and worry grew with the growl of each hungry stomach. There was just no way they could feed that crowd. They completely forgot about the One who had attracted that crowd. So the disciples, thinking they had no alternatives, came up with a plan and presented it to Jesus. **"This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowd away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."** There was still time before the markets closed. Perhaps if Jesus sent the people away now, they could still eat tonight.

Jesus' reply left them dumbfounded. **"They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."** "But...but...but, Lord!", they sputtered. **"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish..."** The apostle John tells us that not even eight months' wages could pay for enough bread for all these people. So they focused on their lack, on their limited supply, on their "not enough". "How can we possibly feed all these people with so little?" The disciples focused on their lack and forgot that with Jesus, the Giver of all things, there are always leftovers.

You and I have been there too, haven't we? How often haven't you or I stood in that remote place watching the time slip by as a big crisis seems to loom larger and larger on the horizon? The problem, the challenge, the issue seems more and more overwhelming with each passing day. So how will you deal with it? The money you have doesn't seem enough to cover it. The strength you have doesn't seem enough to withstand it. The time you have doesn't seem enough to outlast it. The wisdom and intelligence you have don't seem enough to solve it. So the bills or the health problem or the family conflict or the grief or the challenge or the issue leave you restless and worried and frustrated, so stressed that you lose sleep at night.

The temptation is there to take the "cut and run" plan of the disciples and make it your own. "Lord, we just don't have enough." "Lord, I just can't handle this." "Lord, are you even listening to me? Get me out of here!" It's a plan that makes perfect, logical, rational sense, but completely forgets that with Jesus, the Giver of all things, there are always leftovers.

You and I have this tendency to get tunnel vision that focuses on the lack, on the limited supply, on the "not enough". You look at the family budget or the church budget and you think, "There's no way we can do this." You go through another week of family conflict where this person says this and that person says that and these people won't talk to each other and you think, "This will never get better." You get a bad report from the doctor for yourself or a loved one or you deal with the gnawing grief at the loss of a loved one and you think, "There's no way we can get through this."

We get so focused on ourselves and how there never seems to be enough. So we think that our God must lack just as much as we do. It's as if we're telling the Lord, "Sorry, Jesus. This is too big for me. So it's probably too big for you too." We make Jesus out to be so small and powerless, so distant and unloving, so uncaring and unable to help when we are powerless.

So the Lord's promises for those times when we feel powerless leave us dumbfounded like his disciples. "...But, Lord, how can you promise to supply what we need as these bills mount up and the budget goes red?" "...But, Lord, how can you promise to be with me as my health deteriorates?" "...But, Lord, how can you promise to use the problems in my life for my good?" We focus on the lack and forget that with Jesus, the Giver of all things, there are always leftovers.

Let's go back out to that remote place and find out how Jesus responded. He gave his disciples a simple command. **"Bring them here to me..."** "Bring those five little loaves and two fish to me and let me take care of the problem." With thousands of stomachs growling, Jesus **"directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied..."**

Did you notice it? In his almighty power, Jesus could've just given out the bare minimum—one fish and one loaf per person. Yet as the disciples looked out over the thousands of people sitting on the grass, they saw thousands of satisfied tummies...and leftovers. Matthew tells us, **"...And the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over."** Jesus didn't give them a light lunch. He gave them a bread-and-fish feast—and there were plenty of leftovers because that's what Jesus always does.

**"Bring them here to me"**, Jesus says. "Bring to me your troubles and your challenges, your worries and concerns, your lack and your limited supply and your 'not enough', and let me take care of them. Come and see my love for you and what I am willing to do for you. Come and see how I fill your lack, your emptiness with my own fullness, with my own grace. Come and see how I will not only supply your need, but I will comfort you and sustain you and grant you my sufficient grace so that, yes, I will guide all things for your good even those challenges and troubles and issues and problems."

"Come and see what I have done for you. Come and see how my love moved me to take care of your biggest problem, how I left my heavenly home so you could be there with me, how I took your place under my own holy Law, how I suffered in your place for all those times you doubted and denied my love and power for you, how I paid the price required for every one of your sins and conquered death so you could live with me forever."

"Come and see why you have no reason to fear being separated from my love. Come and see how I not only give you forgiveness for your sins and eternal life, but have leftovers waiting for you too—peace in your chaotic and uncertain life, healing for your sin-sick soul, joy in the midst of sorrow, hope in the midst of worry, and a life filled with my abundant grace from the food you eat and the clothes you wear to the heavenly home I have waiting for you. Come and see. Bring to me what's weighing on your heart and mind."

When I look at myself, I realize that with me, there never seems to be enough, but with Jesus, there's always more than enough. From his fullness, Jesus always fills our emptiness, our lack, our limited supply with more than enough grace often in a way we don't even expect. He takes very little and does great things. Just look at how he comes to you and me through words on a page, through a handful of water, through a bite of bread and a drink of wine. Just look at how Jesus uniquely blesses each of us—each of his sons and daughters with his grace and mercy and love and power! He always opens his hand of blessing wide and he's never tight-fisted with us.

With Jesus, he blesses us so much that there are always leftovers just as there were for his disciples 2,000 years ago. Even the smallest, most insignificant leftovers that he provides are blessings of amazing grace that just make your jaw drop. They're blessings we see every day and blessings that Jesus shares with us at special times. They're blessings we see in our personal lives and in our congregation's life.

For example, the Lord in his grace used a lack of money for starting new missions in our synod back in 2005 to provide a new start for this congregation after ten years of pastoral vacancy. ...And we're still enjoying the leftovers of his grace. The Lord in his grace used a monthly Bible study around a dining room table in Evans Mills to start a new mission 8 years later. ...And they're still enjoying the leftovers of his grace. What was originally supposed to be a three-year attempt to restart the mission has become nine years and counting with a real need to expand this facility soon because the Lord brought many of you here so you too could enjoy his grace with us. ...And Jesus continues to bless us so much that there are always leftovers of grace for us to enjoy. I've seen that grace in my own life. Look back on your life and see that same grace poured out abundantly too.

Now you might object, "...But what about the new challenges, the new concerns, the new frustrations, the new "not enough"?" Well, the same Lord, who has always loved us and guided all things for our good, looks at us and says, "**Bring them here to me.** Let me deal with them. Come and see how great my love is for you and how great my power is on your behalf. Don't worry. I have more than enough grace to bless you with abundance."

My friends, trust in the gracious Giver and Provider of all things. Enjoy his feast as he provides for all your physical needs and all your spiritual needs with grace upon grace. Never forget that with Jesus, there are always leftovers because his grace always provides more than enough. Amen.