

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 10, 2013**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)  
Hymns: 16, 352:1, 29, 24, 341:5.  
Lessons: 2 Kings 4:38-44, Acts 9:1-22, Mark 6:30-46.  
Sermon Text: John 6:1-15  
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Our text is just one of many miracles Jesus performed. But we must remember the reason Jesus did miracles. We read in John 20:30-31: *"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."*

Jesus is at the peak of his ministry in Galilee. Thousands gathered to hear him. This miracle near Bethsaida fills the people with such enthusiasm that they want to make him their king. They want to put him on the throne of David to fight against the Romans and reestablish the kingdom of David in all its earthly power and glory. But this is not Jesus' plan.

The Jewish leaders were concerned, as we read later in John's gospel. *"What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."* (John 11:47-48)

The gospels call attention to the fact that Jesus first provides for the spiritual needs of the people but he is not unaware of their bodily need for physical food. Today please listen as

**JESUS PROVIDES EARTHLY FOOD FOR MORE THAN 5,000 MEN**

- 1. Jesus feeds his followers with earthly food.**
- 2. Nothing goes to waste.**
- 3. Jesus refuses to become an earthly king.**

Jesus wanted to spend some time apart from the people with his disciples, but that just doesn't happen at this time. *"A great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick."* When he and his apostles crossed the lake, they found that many people were waiting for him. Jesus had compassion on them. He could not resist meeting the needs of the multitude and soon was in their midst preaching and teaching and healing. He knew that they were sheep without a shepherd. He knew that in their synagogues they were not given the spiritual food they needed and were not directed to the promised Messiah. Christ, the shepherd who could provide them with all they needed, could not withhold food they so desperately desired.

Luke tells us: *"Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, 'Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here.' He replied, 'You give them something to eat.' They answered, 'We have only five loaves of bread and two fish--unless we go and buy food for all this crowd.'" (Luke 9:12-13).*

The disciples became uncomfortable, uneasy as to how this crowd was going to be fed and housed for the night, for at this time of year many Jews were on their way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. The disciples suggest sending the crowd away. Jesus answers *'You give them something to eat.'* John records a little more information. *"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?' He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind*

*what he was going to do.*” Jesus always has a solution, long before we ever imagine, and often before we even recognize that there is a problem. The apostles Philip, Peter and Andrew had come from this area. That helps explain why Jesus might have asked Philip what to do to feed this large crowd. He knew the region.

***“Philip answered him, ‘Eight months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!’”*** Humanly speaking, Philip is right. Perhaps Philip does not understand that the Lord who came to serve on earth is the same Lord on whom all creatures wait, who has sustained them from the creation of the world, and who therefore can feed these few thousand hungry people. Philip thinks only of natural means. Not enough money and not enough food. The situation looked hopeless for the crowd to get supper that night.

Jesus has a solution, ***“for he already had in mind what he was going to do.”***

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

A barley loaf was small and flat, hardly enough for two people, and the fish, pickled or smoked, usually was served as condiment and was eaten with the bread.

The disciples did not pass Jesus’ test. They saw only the insurmountable obstacles instead of trusting Jesus to provide. Similarly today we face tests and think only of the obstacles in our way. But instead of letting obstacles dishearten us, we must trust Jesus to provide.

Jesus always has solutions, but we don’t always recognize them. The story was told in my home town many years ago of a man who slid into the ditch in his car in winter. He was waiting in his car in the snow and told people in the third car that stopped and offered to help him that ‘God put me here, he will get me out’, not realizing that God had already sent three different offers of help. In our sin and self-interest and blindness we don’t always see the solutions God provides.

***“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”***. Imagine what would’ve happened if Jesus said he had bread, or food. Can you imagine a stampede or a riot? They sat down in groups. This would certainly make it easier for the disciples to pass among them and share the food. Everyone sat there waiting to be fed by their good Shepherd, but totally unaware of what was about to happen.

Jesus takes charge. Is it likely that the crowd thought this all something rather ordinary? They all eat, are satisfied and go on their way.

This was a huge crowd! 5000 men, and the women and children are not counted! That could mean perhaps 10 to 15 thousand people or more!

We are reminded of the words in Matthew 6:33: ***“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you,”*** when Jesus told people not to worry about food or clothing. There were surely some among the thousands who had come only wanting to hear the word of life, only seeking the kingdom of heaven. And now the earthly things according to the word of promise were added to them.

***“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.”*** Everyone had plenty. But notice what Jesus did first. He prayed and gave thanks to God. We are reminded of the words of Psalm 145:15-16 (King James Version) which we often use for a table prayer at mealtime: ***“The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.”***

Jesus simply spoke a prayer of thanks and proceeded to distribute food. As he broke the loaves with his hands and the disciples carried the pieces to the people, the bread was multiplied so that there was more than enough for everybody. The same thing happened with the two small fish.

We must always depend upon our gracious Lord to provide us with food but usually he does that through the normal processes of nature that God established: the sun shines and the rain falls and seed sprouts, grows, and is eventually made into food. Fish and other animals reproduce and grow and can be used for food. Humans think that they can manage these processes to some extent, but it all depends on the Lord’s blessing. Occasionally he reminds us of that fact as we experience drought or failure of harvest. On this occasion Jesus did not just speed up the natural processes for growing food. He multiplied the food by his own divine power as

the Almighty Son of God. This was truly a miracle. Yet, we could also think, in a sense, of the miraculous process in which year by year a single seed multiplies itself and provides abundant seeds or kernels.

On this occasion, the supply never ended until all the people had as much as they wanted. ***“When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, ‘Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.’”*** So also in our lives, nothing should be wasted. The disciples knew where this miraculous blessing of food had come from, even if some of the people didn’t. ***“So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.”*** Jesus did not want people to be wasteful just because they had received plenty of food with no effort on their part. He surely is not pleased when we are careless or wasteful with any of his gifts.

Some who read this account fail to see any miracle. They suggest for instance, that the people, when they saw the example of the boy sharing his food, were led to share food they also brought along, so that everyone had plenty to eat. You know, sort of like the story about “Stone Soup”? Ask your children if you don’t remember the story of “Stone Soup”. The Scriptures plainly say first, that Jesus distributed the bread and fish that was identified as coming from the boy; secondly, that the people ate as much as they wanted from what Jesus distributed; and third, the disciples filled 12 baskets with pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. With this amount of leftovers, this was surely not a simple sharing of the food the people had brought.

***“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.’ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.”***

The crowd sees Jesus’ action as fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and immediately wanted to make him king by force. However they had not understood the Old Testament correctly. What they wanted to do would have destroyed everything that Christ had been sent to accomplish. This was another of Satan’s temptations but again, one Jesus did not fall for

The prophet like unto Moses whom God promised to send was also to be a king. If Jesus had the power to feed them, he could also deliver them from the oppressive yoke of the Romans. The fact that Passover was coming, and these people were possibly heading to Jerusalem to celebrate it would be a great occasion to make Jesus king. Some thought ‘let’s take him with us to Jerusalem and declare him a king.’ And if he doesn’t want to go they will seize him with force.

Maybe the people remembered how their ancestors had received manna, water and quail under Moses in the wilderness because it’s clear they wanted this prophet also to feed them. So they set before Jesus the same temptation to earthly power that Satan had used with Jesus earlier, in the wilderness temptations.

The people had missed the real sign in Jesus’ miracle, namely, that he was the promised Christ of God sent to bring them spiritual bread. Before they could act on their intentions however, Jesus, who knew their thoughts, retreated alone to the mountain. He did not want to be made an earthly king.

What an easy life the people would’ve had if Jesus had been an earthly king! When they got hungry Jesus could feed them. When they got sick Jesus could heal them. But Jesus refused to go along with their ideas, not because he was unconcerned about their needs but because he had more important work to do and more precious blessings to bestow.

People, even Jesus’ disciples, did not have a clear understanding of the nature of his work and of the kingdom he had come to establish. The crowd continues to desire earthly bread supposing this is the purpose for Christ’s ministry.

What does this miracle teach us about Christ? It is clear that he is more than just a man. He is also truly God. And we are reminded of his true mission: to bring eternal life for mankind! May we never forget Christ’s real mission on earth. Amen.