

Sermon Notes – July 19, 2020*“What’s In Your Lunchbox”*

Matthew 14:13-21

This story is told in four of the gospels. It must have been a pretty important story because it’s told in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John’s gospels. Some people would say it reminds us of Jesus giving communion to the disciples; he took a loaf of bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them. Some would say it’s because God wanted to remind us of his compassion for people. He wanted to remind us that he is more than capable of providing for our needs. And the other is that he wanted us to know that Jesus wants us to partner with him in his kingdom work on earth.

I heard a cute story as I was preparing for this sermon. A pastor and his wife invited their church council over for dinner at their house. Now, the church council consisted of ten people. The pastor and his wife had cooked dinner for everyone and when they sat down at the table, they asked their little 5-year-old daughter to say the blessing. The daughter says, “Mom, I don’t know what to say! What do I say?” – and Mom replied, “Honey, just say what I say.” So, the little girl bowed her head, put her hands under her head, and said, “Dear Lord, why did I invite all these people over for dinner?” Well, some of you know what that’s like, don’t you – feeding a crowd? You had a bunch of people over and you weren’t sure how you were going to feed them. The disciples in our gospel lesson weren’t sure how they were going to feed the 5,000+ people that day.

Jesus had been teaching and preaching. He was tired that day – and then the disciples came and said, “Lord, John’s been beheaded. John the Baptist has been killed by King Herod.” Jesus was grieving. He said, “Let’s get in the boat and go over to the other side of the lake.” Now, I think Jesus was showing his humanity. He was in shock and grief over the loss of his cousin – the one who had baptized him – somebody that had a special relationship to him. And, Jesus wanted to grieve. Have you ever had something happen to you – where maybe you’re depressed, discouraged, overwhelmed, or exhausted – and all of a sudden, there is a knock on the door and somebody is wanting something from you? Or the phone rings and somebody is wanting you – and you’re thinking, “Lord, not one more person. I just can’t deal with anymore today.” Don’t you imagine Jesus possibly felt that?

He wanted to grieve; but, it says that **Jesus saw the people and he felt compassion**. Have you ever noticed how Jesus was always compassionate toward people in need – whether they were spiritually lost, physically sick, hurting, lonely, etc.? *Whatever the situation, Jesus had compassion for people.* Do you remember how he treated the woman who was caught in adultery? Here was a prostitute – a woman caught in adultery – brought to Jesus and everybody else saw her as a woman of the streets so to speak – but, Jesus looked at her as a person with a name – who needed love, forgiveness, and acceptance. Everybody else saw Zacchaeus as a man who was despised and greedy and selfish – and they hated him. But, Jesus saw him as somebody who was lonely and unhappy – a man who needed forgiveness and friends. Jesus befriended him. Children were brought to Jesus and the mothers wanted him to bless the children, but the disciples said to them, “Get away. Get away. Jesus doesn’t have time for you today. He’s busy.” And Jesus looked at them and was upset. He said, “Forbid not the little children to come unto me – for such is the kingdom of God.” Everybody else saw children as “a nobody,” “a thing,” “a possession” – but Jesus saw them as live human beings with feelings who deserved his full attention. People looked at a leper and others saw someone unclean and untouchable, but Jesus looked at them as needing healing and human touch. He touched them and healed them. He looked at the crowd that day and he had compassion.

Then, I want you to notice something else in that story. Think about the fact that here is all this crowd to be fed and the disciples are tired. They just want to get away. “Let’s go on by ourselves. Send this crowd away and let us go have this evening by ourselves – our meal and our night.” Jesus said, “Don’t send them away. You give them something to eat.” They are looking at Jesus like, “Are you serious? Are you off your wall? What’s going on? Lord, we can’t feed 5,000 people.” And if you read this story in Mark, Luke, and John’s gospel, you’ll find out that Philip (one of the disciples) looked at Jesus and said, “Lord, it would take eight months’ worth of a man’s wages to feed this crowd. Do you really expect us to go get that much bread?” And then, Andrew comes up and he’s trying to be creative and use his resources. He says, “Lord, there’s a little boy here that has got five loaves and two fishes. But what’s that among so many people?” Can’t you imagine that Jesus looks at them in disbelief? “How many times have you seen me do things? And yet, you still don’t believe that I am capable of meeting the needs.”

Think back in the Old Testament, where God provided manna for the people, the Israelites in the desert. They were in the wilderness and they're needing food and water – and they're begging God. “Are you going to take care of us? We would've been better off to stay in Egypt, Lord.” God provided manna from heaven. Have you ever thought about the fact that Jesus could've taken care of it. He could've provided manna from heaven for all those people. ***But, notice what he said - “YOU give them something to eat.” Jesus was inviting them and us to be a part of God's kingdom work here on earth - be part of the miracle.*** In essence, Jesus was saying, “You do your part. I'll do what you can't do. You can't feed all those people - but use your resources, what little you have, and God will bless and multiply it – and meet the needs of the people.” So he says, “Bring me those five loaves and two fishes.” Can't you imagine Jesus thinking, I've got to show them again? He takes the bread and the fishes and he blesses them. Then he gives it and says, “Distribute it.” They end up collecting 12 baskets of scraps afterwards. There was enough to feed all those people.

Some people say, “How did he do that?” Is it a multiplication of the loaves or fishes – or is it just a miracle of sharing? Was it the transformation of people's hearts, who were so selfish, to be motivated to be generous and sharing because of the little boy who shared what he had? ***Dr. William Barkley, who is a New Testament scholar, would say it's not just a miracle of multiplication of loaves and fishes, but is also the transformation of people's hearts - from selfish to generous and caring at the touch of Christ.*** Some would say that it's just the multiplication of loaves and fishes. Some say it's a miracle of sharing. I think it's both. I think, yes, there were some people that were touched by the generosity of that child – but, I think the little that they had, God multiplied and made it enough to feed those five thousand. I think Jesus wants us to know that he invites us to partake in his kingdom work and to be a part of the miracle-working business.

Dr. Barbara Brown Taylor wrote a book several years ago called, “The Seeds of Heaven,” put out by the John Knox press company. In her book, she says, “Stop waiting on a miracle and participate in one instead.” God invites us to participate in a miracle. How cool is that? God says, “You can help me to meet the needs of the people in the world. ***You do what you can. You share whatever you have to share, no matter how small, and trust God to do the rest.***” ***God will bless and multiply it to meet the needs of his children – just as he did that day.*** You see, God wanted them to know that he's compassionate and he cares about all of his

people. He is more than capable to provide for all of our needs. He wanted the disciples to remember. “Guys, don’t you remember that I am capable? ***I can take what is impossible with you and make it possible.*** I’ll take the little that you have and meet the needs of people.”

I read a story in People Magazine a few years ago about a little 9-year-old girl named Cassandra. She lived out of state - she and her mother - her mother was a social worker and she worked with foster children. Her mother came home one day from having taken a child from foster care to another foster home, and she told her kids that night about how this child only had a garbage bag to carry their possessions from one home to another. She said she often saw that with foster kids. It bothered her little 9-year-old daughter, Cassandra. She said, “Mom, we’ve got to do something about that. There’s bound to be a way we can help those kids. They shouldn’t have to carry their belongings in a garbage bag. That sounds like they’re homeless. Mom, let’s do something.” The mom told her that they couldn’t afford to buy luggage for all those kids. “Mom, what about a pillow-case? We could decorate a pillow-case - we could use fabric markers and color it - print their name on it. We could stuff it with stuffed animals and journals and markers and all that! Mom, could you help me do that?” She and her mom plotted that night after dinner - and what they decided was to invite four or five of Cassandra’s friends and their mothers to come over for a cookout on Saturday. During that Saturday cookout, they told what their goal was - to fix these pillow-cases so that these kids would have something nice to carry their few possessions from one home to another. So, I want you to know that they made 100 pillow-cases that night. They decorated them with fabric markers and they found out names of children in foster care (from mom’s work) and put their names on them. They put a note inside each pillow-case, a stuffed animal (dog, cat, teddy bear), a journal, magic markers, and coloring pens. They made 100 that day. In three years time, Cassandra and her five friends donated over 1,000 “Good-Night, Sleep-Tight” pillow-cases for foster care kids. The interesting thing was they put their names in them in case those foster care children would like to write that child. One day, Cassandra got a card from a 12-year-old foster child. She said, “Dear, Cassandra, thank you for my Good-Night, Sleep-Tight pillow-case. It’s wonderful to carry my things in - but I especially liked the cuddly stuffed animal that I sleep with every night. And, thank you for the journal; I write in it every night. Thank you for sharing with me.”

What's in your lunchbox? That day, that's what Jesus was asking the disciples. "What's in your lunchbox? What can you share today? How can you feed these people?" All they had was five loaves and two fishes, but Jesus blessed them. God took the creativity from that 9-year-old girl and made pillow-cases for over a thousand foster care children in her state. Can you imagine? Her creativity - her talent - her ingenuity.

I heard a story about a Jewish priest who was counseling with a man who was inconsolable. He had lost his wife three months before. He was having a hard time getting over her death. Every week he would go to her grave and put flowers on it. Finally, after three or four months, he starting seeing the priest for counseling. After about five months, the priest asked if he was still going to the cemetery every week to take flowers and the man said "yes." The priest said, "I would like you to do something different today with those flowers. I am going to give you the name of the Chaplain at the local hospital. I would like for you to ask the Chaplain of the name of someone there who doesn't have any family - or very little family. I want to ask you to visit that person and share some of those flowers with them. Would you try this experiment for a few weeks - and come back and tell me about it?" He said, "Okay." What the priest was trying to do was to get him to stop thinking about himself so much and start reaching out to others - to build some relationships. About three weeks later, he came back to see the priest. He said, "I can't stay long today. I've got to cut the session short. I've got a meeting with my new friends." As he was sharing the flowers, he made some new friends.

I don't know what is in your life that you can share - maybe it's time - maybe it's skills, talents, and abilities. I heard this past week about somebody who is raising a garden. They took some vegetables from their garden and shared them with somebody in the church who would've been blessed and touched by that gift. I don't know what you have to give and to share, but God is calling us to partner in his kingdom work on earth and to meet the needs of his people. It is so easy for us to get distracted and to be just like those disciples, "Lord, you take care of them. Send them somewhere else. Let somebody else do it. Lord, we're busy. We're tired. We don't want to take care of that need." *Jesus always sacrificed his needs for the needs of people. He was compassionate. He was caring. He wanted them to know that he was more than capable of providing for their needs. No matter how small your gift, he will bless it and use it to touch lives. God provides for us sometimes when we need it most, doesn't he?*

Several years ago, I worked in a church – in First Baptist, Concord. I hadn't been there but just a few weeks, and one afternoon, on my day off, I went to the local mall there and my license plate was called over the intercom. "Will the person with a red Cavalier Chevrolet with license plate so-and-so, please come to the parking lot?" So, I went out there. There were two or three police cars, another car wrecked, and somebody had hit my car. I found out a shoplifter had come out of Belk's and they were parked between my car and this other car. My car was two years old and the other one was brand new. This shoplifter had parked in between us. The security guard chased them to the parking lot, got there, got the car door open, and the lady put it in reverse and took off. When she did, she got their car and mine trying to get out of there. They didn't get all of her tag – just part of the numbers. The police said we would have to turn it in to our insurance, pay your deductible, and then a claim will go through small claims court – and you'll get your deductible back. I thought, "Oh good.. I just need this right now." I paid my \$500 deductible, my insurance took care of the car and it was repaired. I want you to know that I didn't get my deductible back for a year and a half. It went through small claims court. *But I want you to know that it came at the very time that I most needed that \$500.* I had gone to the post office that day, thinking about all the bills that I had due. I was a young minister starting out. I said, "Lord, I need some money. How am I going to pay this bill?" I went to the mailbox that day and I needed exactly \$500 to take care of two bills. Right at the time I needed it most, it was there. **God is more than capable to provide for us and to care for his children.**

God took care of the five thousand. Maybe the disciples were like that lady who said, "Oh, Lord, why did I invite all these people over for dinner? I don't know how I'm going to feed them." Sometimes we look at the needs of the world and think we don't have what it takes to help. I'm not qualified. I don't have time – the resources. But God says, "If you'll give me the little, I'll bless, multiply, and use it to meet the needs."

There was a man who was a Christian and worked in a night club playing a piano. One night, he was playing the piano and in between sets, they took a break. A young girl walked up to him – she knew he was a Christian – and she had been into drugs, had a couple of abortions, and had several other things going on in her life. She'd been in trouble with the law. She walked up to him that night and asked him, "Do you think God could still love me and forgive me?" He said, "Of course, God loves

you and can forgive you.” She went back and sat down; he continued with his music. All of a sudden, when they took another break, she walked back over to him, and said, “Would you pray with me and for me? Would you remind me that God loves me and can forgive me?” He thought, “Oh, Lord, help me. Where’s the preacher when I need him? What am I going to say to this girl?” He said yes to her and walked with her to a quiet corner, praying all the way for the right words to say. He prays for her. He said, “It had to be God working, giving me the words to say.” She gave him a big hug – and he invited her to church. “My wife and I would be glad to sit with you – just let me know when you would like to come.” Weeks later, she came to his church – and she truly got to know the love and forgiveness of God.

Sometimes you don’t know what you have to share or offer – maybe it’s a word of encouragement – maybe it’s \$5 for a meal – maybe it’s sharing vegetables from your garden – maybe it’s sharing some flowers. What’s in your lunchbox? Is it food? Maybe... or maybe it’s something else. There’s a hunger that people have – a hunger to know Jesus – a hunger to have physical food – a hunger for all kinds of things. But, God is calling us to partner with him to do a miracle. May God work in us. May you share what’s in your lunch-box and in your life. Amen.