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One of my former parishioners in Alabama had a great devotion to this morning's Gospel story, and he would become so disappointed if in the course of my sermon I did not mention his theory that the lad with the bread and two fish was actually one of St. Andrew's biological sons. The reason why it has not made its way into one of my sermons, until now, is because it is pure speculation, there is no mention anywhere that St. Andrew was married or had children. Personally, I am not as interested in if the lad was St. Andrew's son, but how St. Andrew got the kid to give up his lunch. There are plenty of possibilities to speculate. The disciples had already done a bit of speculation, reasoning that *two-hundred pennyworth of bread* would not be enough to feed so many. Let us keep in mind the truth that two-hundred pennyworth of bread is not two dollars' worth of bread. What the Bible calls a penny, is actually a denarius, which was a day's wage. To put it into perspective, the disciples are saying almost a year's salary cannot buy enough bread. And even if they had the money, from what village bakery could they buy that much bread? In the face of this speculation, the sacrifice of a poor child's lunch, and indeed a poor man's lunch it was, of five loads of bread and two fish, seems just as insignificant.

But we know how the story goes. After all, this Gospel lesson comes up twice in the Church Year. We hear the story first in Lent when it injects a note of feasting and of God's generous care for us into the middle of our main fasting season. We hear it again today at the end of the Church year to help us remember what God is going to do at the end of time. The prophet Jeremiah, who we hear in this morning's Epistle, who wrote about 650 years before Christ, says that someday God will send a savior who will be a descendant of King David. The savior will gather all of God's people together from all over the world and bring them to live in their promised land. The Advent of the Savior Jesus Christ will be so powerful and so staggering that it will even make people forget God's mightiest act in the past, the Exodus, when he led his people out of their bondage in Egypt. And this is what goes through the minds of those who sat at Jesus feet as He multiplied the bread and fish, feeding them in the wilderness with a new kind of manna, bread, and fish from heaven. This miracle connects to the story of the Exodus and Jeremiah's prophecy even through the clean-up. Jesus' disciples gather up twelve baskets of leftover fish and bread. Twelve is the number for Israel. There were twelve sons of Jacob, and thus twelve tribes. The leftovers gathered up in twelve baskets reminded the crowd that Jeremiah said the savior was going to gather up God's people. The crowd recognizes

what is going on here and they praised God and said, *This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.*

What happens in the miracle mechanically is that as Jesus thanks God for the bread and the fish, they are multiplied and the disciples begin to pass it out. Jesus multiplies what is there, so it becomes enough to feed five thousand people. This miracle of multiplication is not unlike what happens in nature, where, over time, God makes a little become a lot in one sense. For example, from one grain of wheat comes a stalk of wheat that bears a dozen grains of wheat, from one grape vine comes several clusters of grapes every year. But the closest the majority of us may come to this miracle of sacrifice in normal life is in what happens here at the altar on Sunday mornings. The word *sacrifice* means *to make holy, to set apart, set aside, or differentiate.*" Anything we give to God is, in that sense, a sacrifice. On Sundays we make several sacrifices to God which God transforms. We offer him bread and wine, and he gives it back to us as His Body and Blood. We offer Him prayers, and He gives them back answered. We offer Him our sins, and He gives us forgiveness. We offer God *ourselves, our souls and bodies*, and He gives them back purified and energized and filled with His own eternal life. All these things we put on the altar both literally and figuratively, and then God gives them back to us changed, perfected, and purified. By offering this all to God and bringing them before His altar we join our sacrifices to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

To present unto God *ourselves, our souls and bodies to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice*, probably does not hit home as much as sacrificing our money to God through our tithes or pledge. One of our late Bishop's wrote, *The most obvious and material thing we offer to God every Sunday is our money. God doesn't keep the money, He gives it back to us to use for godly purposes. He multiplies the money to make it go farther than we might expect it to go. Money in the most tangible way possible represents everything God gives us. The money we give Him represents in the most tangible way possible the level of our commitment and our confidence that He will take care of us.*

We see this addressed in the Book of Malachi. The prophet Malachi speaks to the nation of Israel who have strayed far from what God desired in sacrifices. Rather than bringing to God the Biblical standard of a tithe, of the first and best ten percent of everything, they brought the least and the worst. God says to them, *will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse...and prove me now...saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a*

*blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.* The uncomfortable truth is that God tells us to make sacrifices, God tells us to tithe, to give him back the first ten percent of everything He gives us. If we don't tithe, we are cheating Him. If we put Him to the test and obey Him, He promises to shower down blessings on us.

In the logic of the gospel, He will multiply our tithe and multiply the faith and commitment it represents. Because of the culture in which we live in, and financial abuses that have scandalized the Church at large, most priests feel they need to provide balance to the words of Scripture. Certainly, your pledge or tithe, regardless of what you call it, is a sacrifice. It is a good thing to do, not just because we are commanded to by God, but because we learn and grow spiritually by making sacrifices to God. The biblical standard is indeed ten percent, but what you tithe or pledge, be it less than or more than ten percent, is between you and God. And when the Scriptures seem to say, *if you tithe God will shower down blessings upon you*, that does not mean that God will give you that Cadillac, motorcycle, or winning lottery ticket you have always dreamed about.

When it comes to sacrifice, we would do well to keep in mind the Gospel lesson from today. A poor child offers his entire meal, a humble meal of bread and fish, likely prepared by his poor mother, unknowingly to the King of Kings. And Jesus does not balk at his sacrifice, He takes it up into His arms, and multiplies it, and the bread and fish of a poor child becomes the bread and fish of heaven. It is transformed and multiplied and feeds over five-thousand people until they are full, with twelve baskets left over. Amen.