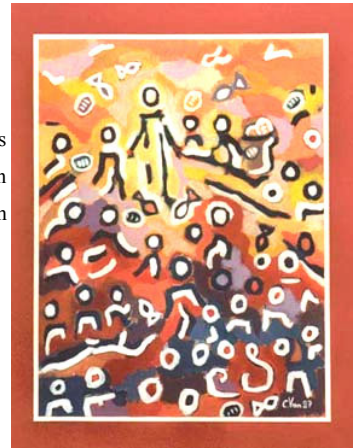


2 Samuel 11:1-15
 Psalm 14
 Ephesians 3:14-21
 John 6:1-21

La Multiplication des Pains
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THIS IS INDEED THE PROPHET

The *Feeding of the Five Thousand* is the only miracle done by Jesus during his ministry and recorded in all four gospels. It was a spectacular event, witnessed by the thousands of people who ate the bread and fish. The version we discuss today is in John 6; the other three are in Matthew 14, Mark 6, and Luke 9.

In the Bible, miracles are supernatural; that is, events that do not have natural explanations. In addition, each miracle of Jesus is a *sign* that signifies something God wants his people to understand about himself, and about ourselves, and about our relationship to him.

Thus, each miracle has two parts. First is the visible part everyone sees – a miraculous restoration of health, or in today’s lesson, the multiplication of the loaves and fish, etc. The second part is the unseen part – the *significance* of the miracle to your life and your relationship to God and his Son, Jesus Christ. This is the part that causes you to lift your nose from life’s grindstone, to experience the great love God has for you, and ultimately to experience the greatest miracle of all – new life in Jesus Christ. In other words, the second part is the impact of the miracle on your heart, and this is the greater part of the miracle.

According to John’s gospel, Jesus did two miracles called “signs” before he fed the five thousand. The first was at the wedding at Cana (John 2:6-11) and the second was healing the official’s son (John 4:46-54). In your opinion, what did these miracles signify? What meaning do they have for you?

John 6:1-6 *After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. ²And a multitude followed him, because they saw the signs which he did on those who were diseased. ³Jesus went up on the mountain, and there sat down with his disciples. ⁴Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. ⁵Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a multitude was coming to him, Jesus said to Philip, “How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” ⁶This he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.¹*

- *After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee* (v.1). Chapters 5, 6, and 7 all begin “After this.” They seem to leave a time gap after the previous chapter. In this case Jesus had been in Jerusalem and (according to Luke 9:10) had returned to the village of Bethsaida, a few miles east of Capernaum on the north shore of the sea of Galilee.
- *A multitude followed him* (v.2). The way this reads, it looks as if Jesus was trying to get away from these crowds. With the large following he had by this time, he had somehow to get alone with his disciples and teach them about himself and his purpose, and he himself needed time alone to rest and pray. Besides, since his hour had not yet come, he also had to avoid confrontations that would lead to his arrest and trial.
- *The Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand* (v.4). The other gospels do not include this, and John does not relate it to the rest of the account. Perhaps the people traveling on the roads leading to Jerusalem added to the multitude that came to find Jesus on that day, when he and the disciples looked down from the mountain and saw thousands of people before them.
- *Jesus said to Philip, “How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?”* (v.5). With this Jesus began, first of all, to teach the disciples a lesson they would not forget. The lesson (there are others as well) is simply this: Something may seem difficult or even impossible, but if God wants it done, it gets done. For

¹ Bible quotations are from the RSV.

example, it is very hard, Jesus said, *“for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God.”* So the people who heard him say this asked, *“Then who can be saved?”* and Jesus replied, *“What is impossible with men is possible with God”* (Luke 18:24-27).

With God, all things are possible. Philip didn't know, but Jesus had decided he was going to feed all those people. Jesus did not have to count them to decide this. His decision was based on their need, not their number. And when you bring your sins to Jesus, he doesn't take much notice of their number either. The Bible says, *“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world”* (1 John 2:2 – NIV).

John 6:7-9 *Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.”* ⁸*One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him,* ⁹*“There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?”*

- *“Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread ...”* (v.7). In other words, Philip's answer to “How are we going to buy bread for these people” was, “We can't do it.” Any of the disciples probably would have said the same. Jesus may have asked Philip simply because Philip was from Bethsaida (John 1:44), which was nearby, and would probably know about shopping there for bread.

However, Andrew and his brother also were from Bethsaida, and Andrew's mind did not turn in dismay to thinking of the bread shops. Instead, he brought the lad with the loaves and fish to Jesus. He had already learned that sometimes, when you bring someone to Jesus, miracles happen. Take his brother, for instance.

- *“There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish”* (v.9). The lad had come forward to offer these things – the food he had brought from home – to Jesus. He too had seen the thousands of people; nevertheless, he offered what he had. Each of us who believes in Jesus must do this. We must, each day of our lives, offer what we have to him. Jesus did not need the loaves and fish, but he used them to feed five thousand people. Nor does he need anything you and I have to offer, but he uses what we have when we offer it to him – sometimes even for miracles.

John 6:10-14 *Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.”* Now there was much grass in the place; so the men sat down, in number about five thousand. ¹¹*Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.* ¹²*And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, that nothing may be lost.”* ¹³*So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten.* ¹⁴*When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!”*

- *Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them ...* (v.11). This is where the great miracle takes place. All the gospels tell it in essentially the same way. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all say Jesus distributed the loaves by giving them to his disciples, who in turn distributed them. But there is no further detail about that magic moment, when five loaves became five thousand. Even if we had been there, we probably would not remember more than just the fact that suddenly there was enough food to feed everyone – men, women, and children – with lots left over.

A few of the commentators suggest a natural explanation: A mood of unselfishness swept through the crowd, and those who had food shared it with others. This is a wonderful idea in the sense that we wish it would happen today, when so many of us have more to eat than we need. But as an explanation for the feeding of the five thousand, it seems contrived and in contradiction with the reaction of the crowd: *“This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!”* They were referring to the prophecy of Moses in Deut 18:18, *“I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.”* Jesus produced bread miraculously, just as God produced bread miraculously in the wilderness in Chapter 16 of Exodus.

In any case, the miracle on that day was not the sudden unselfishness of men. It was the *sign* Jesus gave – the sign that caused people to say, *“This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!”* and gave rise to the first of the seven great “I am” statements of Jesus: *“I am the bread of life”* (v.35, 48).