

SERMON: Abundantly Far More  
TEXT: John 6:1-21

7-25-21

While I was serving as a pastor in Springfield, Missouri, a woman in her 70's who had been teaching Sunday School for over 40 years, came to me with an idea. She had heard about a local organization called *Kids Against Hunger*, and she wanted our older Sunday School children to take part in this mission. As we looked into it and learned more about it, we decided to take a group of young people and adults on a Saturday morning to the small warehouse in another part of town.

The volunteers who were in charge told us about their mission and how we would be helping that day. "Every six seconds, a child somewhere in the world dies from hunger-related causes," they explained. But they had come up with a very inexpensive way to pack and ship thousands of meals around the world. Several church groups, college students and others who were there that day gathered in assembly-line style around 8-foot tables. At the beginning of the line, the first person took a quart-sized plastic bag and placed a smaller bag containing vitamin powder inside. The next person in line scooped a cup of rice out of a large plastic tub and added it to the bag. Then came soy, and finally dried vegetables. At the end of the line the bag was sealed, labeled, and weighed. Then it went in a cardboard box.

This simple mixture, when added to boiling water, would make a tasty and highly nutritious, vegetarian meal developed by food scientists that would feed 4-6 people. Along with the other groups who worked that day, we packed 13,600 bags. Assuming six servings per bag, we helped to feed 81,600 people in just two hours.

It was a fun and easy project, and it was exciting to imagine that our small group representing our small church had helped to feed tens of thousands of people.

In 2008 - their first year - *Kids Against Hunger* packaged 850,000 meals. Within five years, they had changed their name to *Friends Against Hunger* and had shifted their focus from small packaging sessions to an annual weekend event at the Springfield Expo Center called the Meals a Million Pack-a-thon. And, yes, one million meals were packaged in just three days.

It truly felt like we had participated in a miracle much like the well-known Bible story about the Feeding of the Five Thousand. We had done ABUNDANTLY FAR MORE than we ever could have imagined.

The Feeding of the Five Thousand, or the Feeding of the Multitudes - since other gospels differ on the number of people - is a favorite of many people. It's such a feel-good story. It's an amazing miracle. And it involves an astounding number of people. It's more than just the healing of one blind man or the raising of one little girl from death or driving a demon out from one man possessed. This miracle is for everyone in the crowd. Every man, woman, and child is fed until they are satisfied. Everybody eats. Everybody wins. I especially love this version of the story from John, because the miracle begins with a little boy who offers what he has.

But we tend to try to figure it out, don't we? Sure, we believe in miracles, but there must be a trick to this one. Something going on behind the scenes that we don't see. Maybe it was a "stone soup" sort of situation, where other people began to give what they had because they felt inspired - or shamed, perhaps - by the generosity of a child.

I can relate to Philip, who doesn't even have to do the math in order to know that feeding this massive crowd is impossible. "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." And I wonder if Andrew rolled his

eyes and brushed off the boy's offer out of frustration. "Thanks, Kid, but a few loaves of bread and a couple fish aren't going to help. You keep it for your family."

But Jesus 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. And when they were satisfied, Jesus told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up, and the leftovers filled twelve baskets!

Leftovers?! What's the point of leftovers?! I wonder if any of the disciples were tempted to accuse Jesus at that point: "Okay, now you're just showing off." Little did they know, in a few hours he would be walking on water *during a storm*.

Of course, Jesus is not showing off. He's not performing magic. He's not looking for star power or popularity. Jesus is simply responding to human need. People are hungry, so he feeds them. The disciples on the boat are frightened, so he goes to them. Furthermore, he doesn't do the minimum that is expected or

required. He goes above and beyond. Jesus accomplishes ABUNDANTLY FAR MORE than we could ever ask or imagine.

Paul also touched on this idea in his letter to the Ephesians. “I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish ABUNDANTLY FAR MORE than all we can ask or imagine, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.”

You see, there are no limitations to what is possible with Jesus. It is our human knowledge and understanding that is limited. By the work of the Holy Spirit – the power at work within us – God is able to accomplish ABUNDANTLY FAR MORE than all we can ask or even imagine.

However, before we sit back and put our feet up and expect God to do it all, we need to remember that we have a part to play in the miracles that God performs.

Jesus didn't feed that crowd all by himself. He started with five loaves and two fish given by a little boy. And let me read again the end of Paul's prayer for the church at Ephesus: "Now to him who **by the power at work within us** is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever." Through **us** - and by the power of the Holy Spirit working within us - that's how God accomplishes miracles.

Just this week, someone posted a quote on Facebook, one that I had not heard before. "There are two kinds of people - those who believe *everything* is a miracle, and those who believe *nothing* is a miracle." I was surprised to see that these words are attributed to Albert Einstein, the physicist who developed the theory of relativity. I looked further into Einstein's life and learned that he was given the gift of a compass as a child, and from then on was fascinated with invisible things. That anyone can discover such things is certainly a miracle to me and far surpasses my own understanding. And, yes, Einstein placed himself with the kind of people who believe everything is a miracle.

You have been given a quart-size plastic bag this morning, and I am inviting you to take it home and hold it in prayer. Ask God to inspire you and empower you by the Holy Spirit to perform a miracle with it. Respond to someone's need. Feed their hunger. Calm their fear. What miracle can you and Jesus do with a small plastic bag? Then report back to me by phone or email before next Sunday. I know we will be blessed by the miracle stories that come back.

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AMEN.