



**Rev. Shane Page**  
**Matthew 14:13-21**  
**August 3, 2008**

We had just met for our annual finance committee meeting, when one of the members spoke up, saying, “I think we need to be careful about our budget for next year,” he said to the committee on finance. “Things are tight enough as it is; I think we need to trim back, or at least keep things the way they are, cause, you know, we may not have enough come this time next year.” And almost everyone else nods in agreement. After all, most of us read the papers. There are no guarantees, right? What is here today may be gone tomorrow. And when demand is up and supplies are down, it is always in our best interest to exercise a little precaution.

According to Matthew, the disciples had just informed Jesus that demand was up and supplies were down and that it might be a good idea to close shop for the day. “Send the crowds home,” they told Jesus, thinking it would be in the best interest of everyone, since there is nothing scarier than a crowd of hungry people. “No,” Jesus replies, “they don’t need to go away. You – you give them something to eat.” One can only wonder whether the disciples thought that directive was a moment of high comedy or complete insanity. Who knows? Maybe it was a little bit of both.

After all, the way Matthew frames the story there were at least 5,000 people clamoring around the base of the mountain that evening – and that only counted the number of men. For all we know, Matthew implies, there could have been just as many women and children with watering mouths and growling stomachs that evening, too. Eight-thousand to 10,000? Maybe.

“Us? You want us to give them something to eat? Uh, Jesus we only have 5 loaves of bread here and 2 simple fish. Are you out of your mind?” That is hardly enough to feed 5 people let alone 5 or more thousand. And if I had been there that evening, I would have agreed right along with them. They’re right, Jesus. It’s hardly enough. Scanty. Meager. Scarce. We need to tighten up, exercise some reservation here.

Yet Jesus looks at the disciples and says, “Bring them to me.” And Jesus tells the crowd to have a seat on the grass, and he takes what the disciples were assured were their scant and meager provisions – their ‘not enough’ – and blessed it and broke it and gave it to his disciples, and according to Matthew, everyone in that crowd bit off more than they could chew.

Notice that. Notice how Matthew says the crowd experienced more than the temporary relief from the displeasures of an empty stomach.. No, according to Matthew, they were all sated, stuffed, satisfied, so much so that there remained 12 baskets of leftovers by the time the meal was completed.

Once again, Jesus turned the disciples’ thrifty conservatism, their confident convictions of scarcity, into an excuse to host a banquet, a lavish celebration of more than enough. Where they saw drought and scantiness and scarcity—*only* 5 loaves, *only* 2 fish, *only* this much, *only* that much – their God, their Savior, saw abundance.

Oh, dear disciples of Jesus: Always burdened by the weight of their own fears and uncertainties, too cautious to give themselves over to the free and liberating trust in God’s provision.

According to Matthew, that is the most common characteristic of almost all of the disciples of Jesus. In Mark, Luke and John the problem, for the most part, is otherwise. In those gospels, the disciples are, well, oblivious, ignorant, too dull to understand; they simply never get it.

In Matthew's gospel, though, their problem is simply a lack of faith. Their problem is that they have this inability to believe that God is God; that God loves nothing more than bucking conventional wisdom and making a way where there is no way. Over and over again, Jesus says to his disciples in Matthew, "O you of little faith, why are you so afraid? If you only had faith as small as a mustard seed...If God so clothes the grass, which is here today and tomorrow thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" Little faith, little belief, little trust: that was the disciples' problem according to Matthew, and if we are honest with ourselves, it is our problem, too.

Let's face it: We spend most of our time fearing what may lurk around the corner more than anything else. We fear for our safety, our health, our families, our security. I remember catching a headline on the evening news one night, and the anchor said, "Rain is on the way; but what follows it could be the real story. Stay tuned." I, of course, did what I was told, sat through all the commercials, everything. And business headlines: do you ever pay attention to these things? *Market dives on supply fears. Consumer fears worry economists.* The day I wrote this sermon, I decided to check out one of the business headlines for the day, just to see what it would say, and the headline was this: *Economy grows...but warning sounds.* See? Grim. Ominous. Pessimistic. We believe all right, but we believe there is hardly enough to go around, so we had better scramble to get what is ours now while there is still time. We only have 5 loaves and 2 fishes, Lord. What else can we do?

A couple of years ago, a few members of our family paid us a visit, and on one afternoon a couple of the kids, a 3-year-old and a 5-year-old, were about to have their snacks. I was in another room, I recall, when all of a sudden I heard 2 little voices going back and forth: "It's mine!" "It's mine!" "It's mine!" "It's mine!" Finally, the mother spoke up and, exasperated, said, "Guys, there's plenty enough to go around for everyone! You don't need to keep fighting about who's going to get what, OK!" I walked into the room and she looked at me and said, "Gosh, I'll be so glad when they outgrow this stage!" And I thought, "Do we ever outgrow it?" Do we ever outgrow the need to snatch and grab and hold on to what we think we might lose for dear life?

People think of church – especially those on the outside – and what do they think of? Stodgy, stuffy, conservative. I remember last summer how an A/C repairman came to our parsonage to fix our air-conditioner; and at some point he sighed and said, "Well, I guess I need to tell the folks at your church they need to buy a new unit. Let me tell you something," he said, "if you Christians were as tight with the Lord as you are with everything else, there'd be no need for prayer in this world." What a sad commentary this is.

And what a contrast this way of thinking is to the kind of God we worship. You never find stories in the Bible presenting God as this shrewd, stingy, giant Scrooge in the sky who looks for every opportunity to exercise reserve and restraint. Instead, Jesus tells stories of a God who throws a giant bash in heaven when one person is saved; who is like a father who, upon seeing his wayward son return home, bucks the customs of his day, hikes up his robe, runs after him, and orders his servants to host the biggest party on the block. In John's gospel, Jesus attends a wedding where the people start complaining about a lack of wine – a huge embarrassment in

those days – and what does Jesus do? He has them fill 6 huge jugs of water and – on the spot – produces about 180 gallons of wine. I love how John then informed us so matter-of-factly that “this was the first miraculous sign Jesus performed in Galilee.” Signs tell us something, point to something, and what does that sign tell you?

Just look around at all of creation. What is this world around us but sign after sign, and evidence on top of evidence of the lavishness of God? I caught an episode one night of this show called *Man vs. Wild*, a show about some reckless adventurer who braves the elements until he finds his way to civilization, and at one point in this particular episode, as he hacks his way through some brush, he pans the camera upward and focuses on this flower that resembled a lily and said, “Just look at this flower, out here in the brush, growing where no one would have ever seen it except for us; just out here with no purpose, no one to enjoy it, growing! That just shows you how extravagant nature is!” And I thought, “Nature? That’s God being extravagant!” God just creates and creates and creates...And Matthew says there were 12 baskets left over after the disciples were assured there was hardly enough. There is just something about Jesus that loves to turn our excuses about scarcity and lack – *it’s not enough, Lord; we’ll never get by* – into an opportunity for regaling us with his grace and abundance.

A lady once told me, “Shane, in our family it is always ‘it’ll do.’ I like to tell people we’re the ‘it’ll do family.’ If one of us starts something then before we finish it we just look at it and say ‘oh it’ll do.’ No need to go any farther. Let’s stop halfway. That’s enough. It’ll do.” That’s just like us, right? Oh, no need to do anything lavish. Let’s just sit tight, wait it out, hold on to what we have until we have more time or more resources or more and better opportunities to succeed. The forecast looks grim, so many keep telling us, and in times like these it’s always best to use a little extra restraint in the face of an uncertain future. For now, it’ll do. So people claw and clutch and worry and whine about there being hardly enough, sounding almost like those disciples in our story. And that would be, as someone once said, a perfectly reasonable thing to do – if there were no such thing as God.

I know the temptation of being, like that lady said, an ‘it’ll do’ people. I get that way sometimes myself. It’s just safe that way. No need for anything drastic; I can call the shots and be the boss and appeal to my own (very real) limitations. There is just this little problem. This God of ours refuses to be an ‘it’ll do’ God. This God simply refuses to take all this talk of ours about lack and fear and oh-lord-we-only-have-5-loaves-and-2-fishes as the last word. Where we see lack and insufficiency, this God sees blessing, abundance, the opportunity to show us something extravagant.

So we have a choice, I suppose. We could go ahead and believe all the hype and live our lives holding on tightly to what we have, believing we seldom have enough. Seldom enough time. Seldom enough money. Seldom enough talents. Seldom enough brains. Seldom enough skill. And the day will come when we will find that we were right all along. We will have lived in this world as though empty-handed, as though we had nothing to offer, and we will leave it that way, too. Or we can bring ourselves to a Savior who loves it when we think this way, and watch him take our lives and whatever else is ours and turn it into something worth giving away. The choice is yours.