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***A Loaves and Fishes Day***  
***Matthew 14:13-21***

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus heard this, he **withdrew** from there in a boat to a **deserted place** by **himself**. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. <sup>14</sup> When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had **compassion** for them and cured their sick. <sup>15</sup> When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; **send the crowds away** so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to them, “They need not go away; **you give them** something to eat.” <sup>17</sup> They replied, “We have **nothing** here but five loaves and two fish.” <sup>18</sup> And he said, “Bring them here to me.” <sup>19</sup> Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. <sup>20</sup> And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. <sup>21</sup> And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

This story comes after a **TRAGEDY involving John the Baptist**, Jesus’ cousin and beloved friend.

Listen to the verses just before this story:

*Herod had arrested John the Baptist, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife,<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>4</sup> because John had been telling him, “It is not lawful for you to have her.” <sup>5</sup> Though Herod<sup>[c]</sup> wanted to put him to death, he feared the crowd, because they regarded John as a prophet. <sup>6</sup> But when Herod’s birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company, and she pleased Herod <sup>7</sup> so much that he promised on oath to grant her whatever she might ask. <sup>8</sup> Prompted by her mother, she said, “Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter.” <sup>9</sup>*

**And Herod did as she asked.**

Then John’s disciples came for his body, and went to tell Jesus the horrible news. That is the **CONTEXT** of the feeding of the 5000.

The context of this miracle is ***grief, and loss***.

It all takes place during a time of profound sadness for Jesus, and likely for the disciples as well.

In response to the news about John, it says:  
 Jesus withdraws to a **DESERTED place** by himself.  
 Jesus was grieving the loss of his dear friend,  
 He may have also been pondering his own impending death.

The word for **deserted place** is *eremos*.  
 Which means a solitary, desert or wilderness place.  
 That *echoes many stories* in the Bible—in the Old and New Testaments.

In Hebrew thought,  
 the *desert or wilderness is a place of wandering, testing, and temptation*.  
 The Israelites escape Egypt, cross the Red Sea,  
 and spend 40 years wandering in the *wilderness* with Moses,  
 before entering the Promised Land.  
 Jesus is tempted by Satan in the *wilderness*.

But the wilderness or desert is also a place *where God does amazing things*.  
 The Israelites receive bread from heaven, in the wilderness.  
 Jesus is fed by angels in the wilderness after his temptation.

But what if there's *another reason why a deserted place is important?*  
 What if it's where *we often find ourselves TODAY?*

I was reading a blog this week by a man who calls hard days  
 A '*5 loaves and 2 fish kind of day*'.

He's referring to the *desperation of the disciples* in this story.  
 When they ask Jesus to send the crowds away as evening falls,  
 So that they can buy food for themselves,  
 Jesus says, no let them stay.

The disciples are just being practical and sensible.  
 They DON'T have food for 5000 men, plus women and children.  
 They see an obvious problem and point it out to Jesus.

When they urge Jesus to send them away to buy their own food elsewhere,  
 Jesus says "*They need NOT go away; YOU give them something to eat.*"  
 And the disciples reply, "*We have NOTHING here but five loaves and two fish.*"

***NOTHING but 5 loaves and two fish.***

That's what the blogger is talking about.

5 loaves and 2 fish was just one family's meal—not enough for the whole crowd.

When have ***YOU had a 5 loaves and 2 fish day?***

When have you thought *I have nothing*.

I have nothing to give, nothing to share.

I'm at the end of my rope, I'm overwhelmed by life.

I don't think I can do anything to help anyone else.

Maybe you feel that way today!

Maybe a loaves and fish day is a time of ***grief and loss*** for you,

Like it was for Jesus.

Maybe it's the loss of a loved one, or the loss of health or security.

Like dreaded news from the doctor,

Or someone dear has lost their battle.

Maybe you just saw a low balance in the bank.

Whatever the occasion, a 5 loaves and 2 fish day is a ***feeling of scarcity***.

That you cannot help others, or maybe even yourself.

It's a feeling of being depleted.

Of not having or being enough.

It's being overwhelmed.

***We all have these "5 loaves and 2 fish" days.***

When life overwhelms us and stops us in our tracks.

When if asked to help someone else, we might say—what?

My Dad was sick for 13 years, but it was still a shock to actually lose him.

I'll never forget the moment that my mom called Ed to tell him that Dad fell asleep on the couch and didn't wake up.

I didn't even have to ask Ed what happened,

I just saw his face,

and I said, "It's Dad, isn't it?"

We got in the car and drove there immediately.

It was a loaves and fishes day—and season.

I was overwhelmed and didn't feel like I could give much.

***We all know these days, don't we?***

As we live our lives, we do get overwhelmed.

And as we ***look around at the WORLD, we also get overwhelmed.***  
 We feel like there's nothing we can do  
 to solve some of the enormous problems we face:  
 The climate crisis, racism, injustice, war, hunger, poverty.

“5 loaves and 2 fish” is actually a ***pretty common feeling***, when you think about it.  
 And that was the mindset of the disciples that day.  
 But knowing their feelings and fears,  
***Jesus offered them a different option than just fear and scarcity.***

And it all starts with what he does when he first sees the crowd.  
*When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd;  
 and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.*  
 That word for compassion connotes a visceral reaction to what he saw.  
 He knew that they were experiencing their own grief and pain.  
***Jesus saw the people and he HAD to help them.***

And he goes even further—he tells the disciples to bring those  
 5 loaves and 2 fish, and then, *Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up  
 to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and  
 the disciples gave them to the crowds.*

The crowd of over 5,000 people all ate til they were filled!  
 And 12 baskets of fish and bread were leftover!

This is a miracle to be sure.  
 But it's about ***so much more than feeding people*** bread and fish!  
 Like many of Jesus' parables, there are layers upon layers of meaning.  
 What if this is also a miracle of ***compassion***?  
 And ***math***?

The disciples see 7 pieces of food—not enough to feed a crowd.  
 But Jesus sees those same 7 pieces of food—  
 Seven--the number used to describe wholeness and completeness in Jewish  
 thought.  
 To Jesus, seven pieces of food is more than enough.

The math works because ***God is doing the math, not the disciples.***  
 Jesus takes those small pieces of food

and after blessing it, he breaks and gives it to his disciples for them to give to the people.

With God, nothing is impossible, 5 loaves and 2 fish are more than enough.

***So, what if this is also a story about multiplied compassion?***

The crowd stays because Jesus has compassion for them, and starts curing the sick.

Jesus also has compassion for their hunger and so he feeds them.

***And the disciples witness all of this.***

They see Jesus' grief, and the way he moves through his grief to address the suffering of others.

They see his compassion multiplied, at a time when his own resources would have been low.

***What if that's a key part of this incredible story?***

***The multiplying of compassion?***

Of being able to give, and care—when you think you have nothing—but five loaves and two fish?

Jesus saw over 5000 people, all coming to him for healing and hope, and he ***moved through his own grief and pain*** to meet their needs. He helped the disciples see past their fear and scarcity, to feed that crowd.

Now, does this mean that ***we should just ignore our pain and push through*** it all the time—to meet the needs of everyone else?

I don't think so.

I think the story is about something deeper.

Because in this story, we do see Jesus taking care of himself in his grief.

Jesus retreats to a deserted place alone after hearing about the death of John, to regroup and collect himself. "When Jesus heard this he withdrew in a boat to a deserted place" He takes time to grieve and be with God.

He then sees the needs of the crowds gathering around him, he is moved with compassion.

***And he moves towards them, not away.***

Maybe he is moved by his own experience with pain.

Maybe the tragedy in his own life opens his eyes to the needs of others.

We see Jesus bringing compassion and hope, and healing,  
 And the multiplication of the loaves and fish---is a *multiplication of compassion*.  
***God gives Jesus and the disciples, the power to love and serve at a difficult time.***  
 What if God does the same thing for us?

When have you been moved to help someone else,  
 during your own season of pain or grief?  
 When have you been able to reach out, during a time of challenge and trial?

Isn't that a miracle too?  
 What if "*A Loaves and Fishes Day*" is not just code for a difficult day?  
 But also code for "**The day God gives more than enough**".

It's so easy for us to say to Jesus when we are overwhelmed:  
 "*We have **nothing** here but five loaves and two fish.*"  
 We have **NOTHING**.

It's easy to say that about our own resources—in our own lives---  
 In our own church!  
 But what if our feelings of fear and scarcity  
*can be overcome by the power of Jesus* at work in our lives?

Isn't that what we see in this story?  
 In fact, just like the *parable of the mustard seed* in Matthew 13,  
 where the smallest seed becomes the largest tree,  
 these 7 little pieces of food lead to everyone eating,  
 and **12 baskets** of leftovers!  
 12--like the 12 tribes of Israel, and the 12 disciples.  
 Do you think that's a coincidence? No way.

This *miracle story* is found in all 4 Gospels.  
 And it's about far more than food.  
 It is a miracle of *compassion*.  
 Of *provision*.  
 Of *Jesus in action*.  
 Of us—being given the power to serve and love and give.

My Dad died on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020.  
 Exactly one week after closing our church and moving immediately to online  
 services and working from home because of COVID.

At the time of his death, *I felt like I didn't have anything to give*—  
and it was a desperate time for the church,  
when they needed me to step up, in ways I could never imagine.

And you know what?  
God gave me, and Ed, the power to minister then.  
God gave the courage and strength needed.  
And *God did amazing things* during that difficult season.

God has done this *time and again* throughout my life during difficult seasons---  
And I believe that God can do it for ALL of us!

*So, what will you do, when you have a “Loaves and Fishes” day? Or season?*  
Do you believe that God can give you what you need?  
Do you trust that Jesus can multiply what you have? Enough to give?

What if a Loaves and Fishes Day is not just code for a difficult time?  
What if it's code for *God Gives Me More Than Enough!*

*What if that is the Good News?*

That when we come to the *END of what we have---*  
That is the *BEGINNING of what God can do*. Hear that again....  
That when we come to the *END of what we have---*  
That is the *BEGINNING of what God can do*.  
That when we feel like we don't have enough,  
That is the exactly when God gives us far more than we could ever dream or  
imagine!

Friends, hear the *Good News of the Gospel*.  
Even in our own difficult times and places,  
Jesus takes what we have and brings abundance!

*A Loaves and Fishes Day can be GOOD news—GREAT news.*  
*Because Jesus is at work in our lives, and in our world.*  
And for this, all God's people can say together, Amen