



Luke 9:10–17

10 When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida, 11 but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing. 12 Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, ‘Send the crowd away

so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here.’ 13 He replied, ‘You give them something to eat.’ They answered, ‘We have only five loaves of bread and two fish – unless we go and buy food for all this crowd.’ 14 (About five thousand men were there.) But he said to his disciples, ‘Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each.’ 15 The disciples did so, and everyone sat down. 16 Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people. 17 They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basket-

fuls of broken pieces that were left over.

Reflection

As we read yesterday, the man who beheaded John the Baptist is now taking a keen interest in Jesus. And it isn't like Jesus is hiding in a corner. Today Jesus, the one claiming to be God's rightfully anointed king over the land, feeds a veritable army of people just 15 kilometres away from Herod Antipas' capital Tiberias. Here's how the day unfolds from Luke 9:10–17,

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selves to a town called Bethsaida, 11 but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing. 12 Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, 'Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here.' 13 He replied, 'You give them something to eat.' They answered, 'We have only five loaves of bread and two fish – unless we go and buy food for all this crowd.' 14 (About five thousand men were there.) But he said to his disciples, 'Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each.' 15 The

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It's one thing to heal a child in front of an astonished household as Jesus did for Jairus not long ago in Luke 8. But it's another thing entirely to feed five thousand men from five small loaves of bread and two small fish. What's more, five thousand men in ancient reckoning may well have been as many as twenty thousand people when women and children were taken into

account. It is no wonder that this miracle of Jesus is the only one that is recorded in all four gospels. No miracle of Jesus occurs on a larger scale and in a more public setting. And no miracle speaks more loudly as to who Jesus is. That's the question that sits behind Luke 8 and 9. Jesus' disciples asked it in the boat after he calmed the storm. Herod has asked it as he surveys the commotion that Jesus is causing throughout his lands. And no doubt the great crowds so miraculously eating their fill are asking one another the very same question, 'Who is this man?'

Moments earlier Jesus' disciples were grasping at straws. A little boy's pack lunch (we learn from the other accounts), a few small bread rolls and two dried fish to feed twenty thousand people? Then

in our minds eye we see them seat the great crowd in groups of fifty, covering the mountainside, with Jesus and his disciples forming a huddle in the middle at a distance. Then in concentric rings emanating out from around them shouts of astonishment and amazement. The whispers of what is happening reach them before the food as news moves rapidly among the vast seated crowd like a Mexican wave at the cricket. Then they eat and are satisfied, all 20,000 of them!

The story might be familiar to us, but the implications less so. However, for first-century Jews, this particular miracle would have held enormous significance in affirming the identity of who it is who is standing before them. In John's account he gives us the context,

The Jewish Passover Festival was near. John 6:4

The Jewish Passover Festival is near, it's spring, Passover season, the time when many zealous Jews expected the Messiah to appear, when he would repeat the miracle of God feeding the Israelites in the desert just as had occurred after the original Passover and their exodus from Egypt. God had fed his people with manna – bread – from heaven in their time of wandering in the desert after he rescued them from Egypt and before he led them into the Promised Land. In today's passage the son of God repeats this miracle. And to the Jewish consciousness the implications would have been near overwhelming. It's no wonder that John concludes

his account with them trying to make Jesus king by force.

But each Gospel account has its own perspective and what stands out for me in Luke's version is Jesus' hospitality towards these vast crowds. Jesus taught the crowds about the kingdom of God, but the kingdom of God is not just words. Jesus healed people and fed the hungry. He welcomed them (9:11). He practised hospitality. They've come out into the middle of nowhere and neglected to bring any food. But Jesus doesn't take the opportunity to teach them about planning ahead, or about fasting, or about patient perseverance in times of hardship. He feeds them. He practices hospitality, on a grand scale, until everyone has had their fill. And his lavish act of hospitality reinforces, in a

deeper and perhaps even more powerful way, the truth of what he has been teaching them about his identity and his mission.

Think

In Exodus 16 when God fed his people manna and quail from heaven Moses was there but did little more than spectate. Jesus broke the bread and fish, prayed over it, and fed twenty thousand with the meal of one small child. The prophet Elisha in 2 Kings 4 fed a hundred men with twenty barley loaves; Jesus fed far more with far less, and there was an abundance left over. His provision is ample for the twelve tribes of Israel, ample for all of Israel to eat their fill with ample leftover for the other nations as well. Because someone great-

er than Moses is here. Someone greater than Elisha is here. God now walks among his people in the person of his Son. And his people now extend beyond Israel to include all the people on earth whether they be synagogue leaders like Jairus or those who live on the margins of society like the demon-possessed Gentile who lived amongst the tombs or the unclean woman who'd bled for twelve years – especially these, because his power is sufficient and it is made perfect in weakness. If this is what Jesus is able to do with a little boy's packed lunch what might he be able to do with your life? You may feel insufficient but just like his disciples you are dramatically underestimating your wealth in Christ. If he can feed twenty thousand people out of nothing, imagine how he can use your life to do extraordinary things for

his kingdom.

Think

As a starting point offered to us by Luke why not consider today your hospitality. Biblical hospitality is welcoming friends and strangers alike into your home and into your life. In today's passage Jesus enables that little boy to share the little he has with a multitude, and those great crowds are blessed through that little boy. This can be your story too when it comes to generosity towards outsiders. The amount of people who pass through your dining room down throughout the years. The new mothers that you cook food for, the new people to church you invite over or out to lunch. The food you provide for your mid-week groups, time and time again, not a chore

but a joy in being able to serve others in the manner that Jesus did today. Verse 17,

17 They all ate and were satisfied

And a deep impression was made for the kingdom of God.

Pray

Pray today for opportunities to serve God in both the small things and the big. Pray for opportunities not just to speak about the kingdom of God but to live it. Pray for an opportunity today to invite a friend or friend-to-be over for a meal so that you can share with them a small glimpse of the kingdom of God and leave an impression on them for him.