

I LOVE TO TELL THE STORY

The Bible is filled with many stories that both thrill us and also teach us valuable lessons. These true stories, both in the Old Testament and the New are the workings of God in people's lives to both fill us with inspiration and reveal to us the mind of God. I love to read them over and over and pass them on to others. Each one is a vital link to the values and rules we need to follow in order to live as enlightened Christians in today's turbulent world. Even though they were written thousands of years ago, they are still relevant in our daily lives today. If we didn't have those wonderful stories, how would we know God? How would we know to do the things that bring us into a closer relationship with our Creator? These stories are, in fact, God's voice to us, communicating to us the information we need to survive in this evil, sin-ridden world.

Only one of the stories of Jesus is recorded in all four gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John...Each of these were from a different perspective, 4 different angles. Each author brings a unique point of view to his account as each writes for a different audience. The miracle of the multiplication of the 5 loaves and 2 fishes must be very important to have it retold by all 4 gospel writers. The reason for that is because this miracle was so public and powerful as to make an undeniable and irrefutable statement about Jesus' person and his ministry. Today we will be talking about this miracle, one of the most famous stories that people remember from the Bible. It is a story that took place one day on the side of a mountain with over 10,000 people in attendance. We

all heard that wonderful story in our gospel reading this morning, but let's talk a little more about it.

Here is the setting: The Bible tells us that Jesus, after he had healed many sick people, crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee, went up on a mountainside and sat down to rest. He was tired. He looked up to see a large crowd of people following Him because of his work with the sick earlier. It was a hot, dry afternoon and the disciples were becoming increasingly anxious... The crowd that followed Christ was a large one, a bit unruly, maybe close to a mob. They were certainly not a calm and orderly bunch looking for bottled water. They were also tired and hungry and they were looking for Jesus to display more of his power. This crowd was not motivated by faith, repentance, or genuine love for Jesus. On the contrary, they followed the Lord because they saw the results when he healed the sick... they were thrill seekers who failed to grasp the true significance of Jesus' miraculous signs - which pointed unmistakably to Him as being the Son of God. They flocked to see his works, but ultimately refused to accept his words. They sought the benefit of his power in their physical lives, but not in their spiritual lives.

Jesus then said to Phillip. "Where shall we buy bread for all these people to eat?" In reality, we read that Jesus was just testing Phillip because Christ already knew what he was going to do. But Phillip replied that it would take more than half a years wages to buy enough bread for each person to have just a bite! Another of the disciples, Andrew, spoke up and said he had seen a small boy with 5 small barley loaves and 2 small fish, but how far will that go among so many?

Jesus said to them, "Have the people sit down." It was a nice comfortable place to rest since there was plenty of grass, and they all sat down, about 5000 men were there, plus another 5000 or more women and children. Wow! Over 10,000 hungry mouths to feed and such a small amount of food... Now, get this, the boy who has so little gives his insufficient "nothing" to Jesus. What little he had he put into the hands of God. Jesus took the 5 small loaves of bread and the 2 small fish, gave thanks, and gave the bread and fish to all those who were seated, (remember there were over 10,000), as much to eat as as they wanted! Now, wait just a minute...Everyone had all they could eat AND there were leftovers too? We know this because Christ instructed his disciples to gather up all the leftovers so nothing would go to waste and they filled 12 baskets with all the food that wasn't consumed by the crowd. Isn't God wonderful?

The most amazing part of this miracle meal, however, goes way beyond the loaves and fishes. In his book John wants to remind us that this meal took place near the time of passover when the Israelites were told to eat the meat of a young male sheep or goat, bitter herbs, and bread without yeast, and it is also a reminder of the daily bread in the form of manna that sustained the Israelites in the desert as they were traveling to the land of milk and honey. It is also a foretaste of another meal that will take place on or around passover in the upper room before Christ's crucifixion, the last supper when Jesus will eat with the disciples. There in the upper room, Jesus hosted the meal, broke the bread and gave thanks for it and distributed it to the twelve. This is the meal we're still enacting today when we gather around the Holy

Communion table. This is the Bread of Life - the Bread that keeps on sustaining, filling, and strengthening us. I am the "Bread of Life" Jesus says to the hungry crowd, "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. (vs.35). It is that bread that enables us to live forever. It's a free meal that is offered to us by the one who already paid for it with his broken body and shed blood. All we need to do is to come and receive it with thanks and a humble heart.

There are 3 more miracles that we read about in this 21 verse passage. The next miracle takes place when, at evening time, Jesus dismissed the crowd and told the disciples to get into a boat and go on without him. He then went back to pray on the mountainside. So, the disciples went down to the water where they got into a boat to cross the lake to go to Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. The disciples became discouraged and afraid. Shortly before dawn, after they had rowed about 3-4 miles, and miracle two occurred when they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water. They were frightened and cried out, "It is a ghost".. But He said to them, "Take courage, it is I; don't be afraid". Then and only then were they willing to take Him into the boat. And miracle three happened when He got into the boat, the wind died down, and all became calm. Those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, Truly, You are the son of God." But only one of the gospels, that of Matthew, chapter 14:25-32, tells of Peter's attempt to walk on water toward Christ and his failure to do so because of his lack of faith. It's easy to get discouraged when our resources are inadequate. But God is at work in our lives, especially in the midst of fear and doubt. When you feel all alone, God promises, "I will never leave you or forsake you."

Here is a story about discouragement. The only survivor of a shipwreck was washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for God to rescue him, and everyday he scanned the horizon for help, but there was no help forthcoming. Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect himself from the elements and to store his few possessions. One day, after looking for food, he came back to his little hut only to find it in flames. Everything was lost. He was stunned with grief and anger. "God, how could you do this to me?" he cried. "I have so little and you took it all." Early the next day, however, he was awakened by the sound of a ship that had come to rescue him. How did you know I was here?" asked the weary man. "We saw your smoke signal," they replied. Praise God!

The fourth and last miracle in this scripture is in just a last ending of the final sentence found only in the gospel of John verse 21, and it states that after Jesus got into the boat, "immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading." Those words are astonishing. Christ defied time and distance which demonstrated his ability to defy "natural laws." For Him that was no great thing at all because He invented those laws...Who can explain how he turned water into wine? Or, how he was able to cleanse leprosy with a word, or how he could bring Lazarus out of the tomb all wrapped up like an Egyptian mummy? So it is no great thing that one moment the boat was off shore 3 miles and the next moment, immediately "the boat was at the land at their destination.

Because this wonderful story emphasizes Christ's power and control four times within 21 verses, how can anyone ever doubt that we have a Savior that loves us and takes care of all our needs? Christ saw the need in the crowd, so he fed all 10,000 with just 5

barley loaves and 2 small fish. He walked on water to get to the disciples in the boat, and then He saw the need to calm the storm for his disciples in the boat, so He did. And lastly, he saw the need to arrive quickly and safely to the other side of the lake, so He caused time and distance to be erased! The entire Bible is filled with these powerful stories of God's love toward us. Always remember that the grace and gospel of Jesus is sufficient for every need for the whole world. He is the Good Shepherd. His powerful provision begins only when we recognize our need. So, the only thing you need is a necessary need. Don't ask for frivolous things that you could easily do without. If you have a necessary need you cannot meet, will you offer it to God for His good and generous provision? He will always answer...You think about that... Amen