

## When Ordinary Becomes Extraordinary

John 6:1-21

Dr. Patricia L. Hunter

Seattle First Baptist Church

July 26, 2015

John 6:3-14

Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?"

Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then 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. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."

The word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Before I start my message, let me first say, how happy I am to be part of the pastoral staff of SFBC. It is the perfect time for me to be here and obviously the right time for you to have me. Your hospitality these past two weeks has been overwhelming. I have lived long enough to know that church people don't have to be nice. So I don't take your kindness for granted.

This week I had a tour of the facilities. Talk about being totally impressed! By the time Vicky and I finished walking up and down the towers and through the gym and bowling alley and down to the shop and around the baptistry and around the columbarium, and God only knows where else we went, I had my 10K steps in on my Fitbit!

You are rightly proud of your legacy and from my vantage point, your future looks exceedingly bright.

Well, I best get on with the message since I have been instructed that if I want your kindness to continue, my sermon had best be no longer than 15.

The story of Jesus feeding the multitude is a familiar one for those of us who have been in the church for some time. If you are a new believer or if it has been a while since you

paid attention to bible stories, this story of feeding 5000 people is the only miracle that is found in all four gospels. And in the gospel of Matthew and the gospel of Mark the story is told twice in each book. So obviously there are some important lessons we are to learn from these stories.

Word had gotten around about Jesus and the way he taught and the miracles he performed. People wanted to see for themselves what Jesus was all about. It also happened to be that time of year when a large crowd of people were in route to celebrate the Jewish Passover. So with the combination of the curious and those on their way to the great celebration, there were lots of people around.

Our text says that Jesus asked Phillip how they were going to feed all those people. Now, this was a trick question. Jesus knew Phillip didn't have a clue as to what to do. As far as Phillip was concerned, this was an impossible predicament. There was no way the disciples could feed all those people. In fact, Phillip said it would take 6 month's wages to feed everyone. At \$15 an hour that would be almost \$15,000. And even if they could find the money, there was no County Buffet, Subway, or IHOP close by. So for the disciples, the request was impossible.

When Jesus asked about feeding the crowd, the disciples only heard Jesus asking them to do something they didn't have the power or resources to do. From our 21st century perspective, it is easy for us to criticize the disciples. The disciples already knew that Jesus had turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana. They knew that Jesus had healed the Centurian's son and healed the man who laid by the pool for 38 years unable to walk. But still, the disciples had yet to grasp who Jesus really was.

Well, before we get too self righteous, we have seen miracle after miracle in our lives and we still doubt that God can do anything, but fail. We've gotten jobs we clearly weren't qualified for and that was nothing but God. We've graduated from schools and gotten degrees, only by the grace of God. We've seen God's healing power at work when the doctors had given up.

Everyday we see God's awesome presence in nature and particularly when Mt. Rainier chooses to make an appearance. And, when we made some really stupid decisions, God made a way out of no way and brought us through to safety. Surely, after all we have seen God do in our lives we would believe that God can do anything, anything. Well, on our good days we may believe God can do anything, but on those other days--perhaps we just lack the faith that God will.

Good thing Phillip was not the only disciple around when Jesus said it was time to eat. Andrew was there. And, Andy saw a boy who had five loaves of bread and two fish. The boy didn't have a lot, but he gave Jesus all he had. He didn't have \$15,000 worth of food, he had \$20 in today's currency.

The message of feeding the 5000 is that when we give God the little that we have, miracles *will* happen. When we do all that we can do, we can trust God to do the rest. The boy gave Jesus an ordinary offering of bread and fish, but Jesus was able to transform that which was ordinary into an extraordinary array of abundance.

So how does this relate to us today? There are some issues in our country that seem overwhelming. They are not new. In fact they have been around for generations and little if anything has been done to solve them. Take gun control--how many more mass shootings will we need to have before congress takes on the NRA?

Homelessness--people are living on the streets everywhere in Seattle. They are sleeping in city parks, in tents under freeways, in doorways, and entire families are living in cars and campers. With multi-use development, new condos, and apartments going up all over town, why can't we find a way to house those in need of a roof over their heads?

And what about America's original sin of racism. It is alive and well, even in progressive, lets-be-nice, Seattle. We may not have confederate flags flying, but I have tired of having people following me around in stores like I am going to steal something.

These are just a few of the issues that seem too hard for us to solve. But there are others. There is hunger. With all the food that is produced in this country, why is it that so many are not really sure where their next meal is coming from? There is double-digit unemployment for people of color and our youth, there is education disparity, and unequal justice in our courts and prison systems.

Then there are personal issues that seem insurmountable, broken relationships, addiction issues, and not having enough money to pay basic bills month after month after month.

Phillip would say, there is no way we have the resources or knowledge to solve these issues. Too often we acquiesce to see the glass as half empty. But thank God there is always an Andy around who can't see a whole lot, but can see enough. Andy said, "Here is a boy with five loaves of bread and two fish." And when we give thanks for what we have instead of lament about what we don't have, miracles happen.

What do you have this morning that God wants to use for a miracle. It may seem as nothing or ordinary to you, but God can use it to perform a miracle. God can take our ordinary gifts, skills, and resources and turn them into something extraordinary. Is it money, your time, your knowledge, your gift of teaching, your passion for justice and community organizing, your ability to write, your love for children, your gardening or cooking skills.

I know we can solve the really hard issues of our time. We just have to want to do it and be willing to be part of the solution instead of just complaining about the problems. How do I know it can be done? Twenty years ago, few of us believed that marriage equality would be the law of the land in our lifetime. You can't tell me that the God of justice, love, and mercy had no role in all of this.

How do I know that God specializes in the impossible? Because at the end of the meal after all 5000 were fed, there were 12 baskets full of food left over. It can be done.

What gift do you have that God wants to use. It doesn't matter how small it may be. The spiritual says,

This little light of mine I'm gonna let it shine...

Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine...

Jesus gave it to me, so I'm gonna let it shine...

Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Let us pray. God we thank you for this reminder that nothing is too hard for You, and for the reminder that if we want to see a miracle, we have to be willing to participate. We thank you for all the gifts you have given your people in this place. Light a fire under us, to use our gifts to your glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen!

As we sing our closing song, This Little Light of Mine, if you are here today and have been moved to deepen your life in faith by joining this community, won't you please come forward.