



**LAKWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

**Brian Mitchell**

**032226**

*Always Loved. We Forget*

**Luke 9: 12-17**

---

Thanks to Alexis and Connor for serving as Liturgists this morning.

As many of you may know the World Cup will take place this year, right here in the USA. And for the first time since 1998 Scotland will be there. I expected a bigger cheer! I want to take you back to November last year. Scotland's team is playing Denmark, the number 1 seed in our qualifying group. Scotland needs to win; any other result means Denmark qualifies. 3 minutes on the clock and Scottish winger Ben Doak plays a beautiful cross into the penalty box. It looks like it is behind everyone, until midfielder Scott McTominay leaps up, raises his feet high and with a beautiful overhead kick places the ball into the bottom corner. A true thing of beauty. Perhaps Scotland's greatest ever goal. A soccer ball, that's all it is, I can kick it around and make it look OK, but put it in the air with Scott McTominay waiting, and he does something extraordinary with it.

A simple paintbrush. I can use this and make some form of painting that will not be too pretty, but in the hands of a master, it produces the Mona Lisa. Something that is adored by millions for generations to come.

In the hands of the master, something beautiful and wonderful can be done with the most limited resources. And yes, I did just put Scott McTominay's goal against Holland on the same level as the Mona Lisa. This morning, we continue with our Lenten series, "Loved Always", using some thoughts from Joshua's Lenten devotional. Today's Gospel story is one where Jesus takes what seems at first to be limited resources and does something wonderful. Something miraculous.

This story is one that is recorded in all the 4 Gospels, in fact the only miracle that is found in all four gospels. The story of the miraculous feeding of the 5000. The story is one we learn early in Sunday School. A much-loved story, but also one that provides questions. As Luke tell it, Jesus is trying to escape the crowds, he has gone to Bethsaida, but the crowd finds this out and follow him. Jesus welcomes them, teaches and heals.

As the day draws on the disciples ask him to send them away to find food and shelter for this spot is remote. Jesus responds. "You give them something to eat."

They respond that they have only 5 loaves and 2 fish. How is this going to work?

Joshua reminds us in his day 22 devotion that had already seen Jesus do amazing supernatural things, yet they still wonder how they can feed these folks. I love Joshua's line, that they forgot what kind of story they are in.

I would imagine that would resonate for many of us. We all have moments when we may fear, we may doubt, we may ask if we are enough, we wonder if our faith is strong enough. Our gaze may slip away from the one who provides when we think we do not have enough. We have all probably experienced forgetting what kind of story we are in. So let us pause for a minute and consider what kind of story we are in. We are in a story where Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, the King of all Kings, has our back. We are in a story where Jesus is the one who is in control. A story where Jesus says to us, as he says to the disciples, give what you have. You only have 5 loaves and 2 fish, give what you have. Your faith is weak and you are full of doubt, give what you have. Jesus says, what you have is enough because I am with you and I will make it work. The story you are in is rooted in God's provision. What God has given is enough and what God has given is rooted in God's love and grace, so sure you may want to bring more and perhaps you will, but what you bring today is enough.

Jesus took the food, gave thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; he does the same with the fish, as much as they wanted. When everyone has eaten their fill, Jesus instructs his disciples to gather up all that is left and they fill 12 baskets. In John's Gospel, the folks in the crowd are amazed and recognize Jesus as something special, he is the prophet who has come. There is no such statement of the people in Luke. If we read on, Luke has Peter's declaration of Messiah serving that purpose.

As I look at the story I do wonder how this could have happened. Did the bread and fish multiply all at once, did it happen as the disciples handed it out, did the bread and fish grow? I am left wondering if this was a magic act, if people noticed what was happening.

Now up front, I have always been a believer who is comfortable with the supernatural Jesus. I find comfort in a God who can do the unexplainable, who can confound science

and the natural way of things. But I have also had many conversations with good believing women and men who struggle to accept some of the miracles as literal events, to the point that it can be a hindrance to belief. Many young folks I have watched grow in faith, come to a point when the supernatural stories in scriptures are the very thing that makes them walk away. Many legitimately struggle with stories such as these. Or see them as metaphor meant to teach a lesson as opposed to an event that actually happened. I have read and listened to many folks with compelling arguments as to why that could be so. This may be one that we struggle with. The truth is we don't know how this actually happened. But we do know it is an important story, that much is true, why else would all 4 gospel writers include it. If the supernatural is problematic for you, the commentators provide a few options. It is suggested by some it may have been a sacramental meal, that each was given a small morsel, it is a communion type meal and all are fully fed spiritually. That doesn't work for me as I think on the leftovers.

We have another option. Perhaps we had a crowd who did indeed bring their own food, tucked away up a sleeve, in a bag, not enough to share, so perhaps hidden. That does make sense, as mentioned they had travelled far, it is unlikely they would not have gone so far without supplies. Perhaps they saw Jesus bless the little provision he had and start to pass it out and share. Moved by his example, they start to put their food into the basket as well, until there was plenty for all. Well that diminishes the supernatural aspect of the miracle; we don't need as much faith for that story. Perhaps the miracle is that, being in the presence of Jesus a crowd of selfish folks suddenly became generous sharers. Perhaps it is a bigger miracle to see the men and women changed, than to see fish and bread changed.

Much to think on, but I would not discount that Jesus may have simply fed over 5000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish. Let's allow our God to be big. I certainly believe Jesus could do any kind of miracle he wanted as the Gospel writers seem to have no need to explain or justify the miracle, they all simply report it. One thing that cannot be denied is that Jesus provides much from little. With the few resources made available at the end of the story all are fed and fed well.

We see this pile of food, and it reminds us of some of the good that is done here. Not only is there is food being supplied to UCOM, but there are also hundreds of volunteer hours from LPC folks there and at The Sulzbacher Center. Many bellies are full because of that work. The Bag Ladies ministry providing comfort for many years. The Lucille

Hart Fund, I-Care, The Turkey Fund. Mission trips, Community Egg hunts and Trunk or Treat. The list goes on and I apologize to those I missed. For 50 odd years folks have had their spiritual needs met in this community, they have found meaning in their faith, they have found comfort in their hurting and mourning, they have been carried by this community of faith, and they have carried others when needed. God has been at work and is currently at work. Our church started in a few garages a couple of streets down University Blvd.

I wonder if that small band of folks who started this place all those years ago knew what lay ahead. Who amongst them would have known what was to come, who amongst them would have known about the many ministries of this place that have touched people's lives. None of them would have. None among them would have known. Just like the disciples who said, we've got some fish and bread, had no idea what Jesus would have done with it, no idea from this meager meal, 5000 would be nourished. No, they did not know, but they were faithful and from that small number, from that first Lakewood Presbyterian Church version of 5 loaves and 2 fish if you like, God has nourished many. Of course there is still much to be done, the story is not over, but it is good for us to remember the story we are in.

Sometimes, we look at ourselves as a limited resource. We don't know enough about faith, the Bible, not a great speaker, we're too stressed, too busy. What could we give that others could do better. I think that is when God is thinking, I have you just where I want you, when you think you cannot do it, God steps in. God takes these limited resources and does something cool. I am aware of my limited resources, yet God allows me to serve. I am sure many of you feel the same way when you serve God and church. The folks that invested in me as a teenager had no idea this would be my job. Think on those who invested in you, did they know the things you would do for God? Never let what you perceive to be your limited resources get in the way of what God can do with you. And remember perhaps especially in those moments when you struggle, that you are in a wonderful story.