

August 17, 2014  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: John  
Community Baptist Church  
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*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as you prepare to study John 6:1-15.

1. Why did Jesus ask Philip about food when He already knew what He was going to do?
2. Why did Jesus tell the disciples to feed the people (Mt. 14:16)?
3. Consider why Andrew knew about the boy with the food.
4. Why did Jesus not allow the people to make Him king?

### **GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT**

#### **John 6:1-15**

The feeding of the five thousand is one of the most well known of Christ's miracles. We have to admit that it is quite astounding. Try to imagine what 5,000 people look like? That is a pretty good sized court at the local hockey game or a packed house at the Greenville Drive game. But, let's remember in this story that 5,000 was only the number of men who Jesus fed. If we estimate the number of women and children added to that number, we could well exceed 20,000 people. That is way more than can even fit in the Bon Secours Wellness Arena, even if it is set up for a concert. Yes, the feeding of the multiplied thousands was pretty spectacular.

But most of the time, the story fails to accomplish its goal. This is the fourth sign John recorded in order that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:30). What good is a philanthropist who

provides one meal for you? I get hungry three times each day— or at least I convince myself that I am hungry that often. We all need someone who provides eternal satisfaction for our spiritual thirsting and hunger. We need the kind of food that, like the water Jesus offered the woman at the well, continues to satisfy.

That is really the picture Jesus presented when He told the disciples to give the crowd something to eat. We must learn that Jesus Himself is the satisfying bread and then we must give Him to those who are hungry.

#### **The Setting (vv.1-4).**

We begin reading in this section of John's gospel, *After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias (v.1)*. Naturally our question is going to be, "After what?" Where He went is not much of a question. Generally speaking, we know where Jesus took the disciples. They went to the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee. This has to mean that He and the disciples had returned from Jerusalem. So it was after that. However, we are not sure how many days have elapsed. Whenever it was, Jesus took the disciples to a desolate place where Jesus and they could rest according to Mark's account (Mark 6:31). It was someplace near the small village of Bethsaida (Luke 9:10).

The phrase *after this* also helps us figure out the historical context. It had to be after Jesus had been in Jerusalem at the feast, where He healed the lame man (5:1-17). It was in that setting that Jesus also taught about His equality with God (5:19-47). The truth was not received well by the religious folks because then and there the religious leaders decided they had to kill Jesus (v.18).

It also seems pretty certain that this had to be after Jesus had sent out the twelve disciples with authority and power (Mark 6:30). Jesus had sent out the twelve at some time within the context of them being at the feast in Jerusalem. Maybe He did that just after they had returned to Galilee. Now the twelve had returned with reports about the amazing power Jesus had given them.

Furthermore, this was almost certainly after Herod had killed John the Baptist. Matthew began his account about this miracle by writing, *Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself (Mt. 14:13)*. When Matthew said that Jesus *withdrew from there*, “there” must be Nazareth where He was rejected (Mt. 13:53-58). In that setting, Jesus heard that Herod had killed John, and He took the disciples to a remote area around Bethsaida. No wonder Jesus and the disciples needed rest (Mark 6:31).

Also, we know that the Passover was at hand (vv.2-4). It does seem a bit strange that a large crowd was following Jesus instead of heading for Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Maybe they would go up later. Then again, it was not unusual for large crowds to follow Jesus (vv.2-3). Mark wrote, *Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them (Mark 6:33)*. Many of those people clamored after Jesus’ miracles. *And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick (v.2)*. Though this is only the fourth miracle John chose to record, Jesus had done many mighty works by this time. He was even healing the sick in the crowd the surged around Him that day.

Many of the people in the crowd also clung to Jesus’ teaching. John told us that *Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples (v.3)*. Typically when Jesus sat down, He taught. Matthew’s account seems to say that such was the case in this situation. *When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things (Mark 6:34)*.

It was a very special time of the year. *Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand (v.4)*. If the unnamed feast in chapter five was the Feast of Tabernacles, as we suspect, then this would have been about six months later. However, it is possible that the unnamed feast was the Feast of Passover. If so, this would have been about a year later. In that length of time, the crowds that followed Jesus grew to be quite large. We can be fairly sure that this miracle of feeding took place in the spring of the year 29 which would be the second year of Jesus’ ministry. That leaves ample time for all the events included in the idea of “after” that we considered above.

## **First Lesson: The disciples would see evidence that Jesus is the Messiah (vv.5-13).**

Jesus took the disciples to a remote place near the village of Bethsaida, and, as the crowds approached them, Jesus asked Philip a question (vv.5-7). It is important to understand that Jesus chose to test one particular disciple (vv.5-6). At some point in the day, Jesus posed a question to Philip. *Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” (v.5)*.

It appears that Jesus asked this question shortly after He and the disciples had arrived at this desolate place. If that is so, why do Matthew, Mark, and Luke give a different slant of the problem, probably from a later point in the day? They all agree that *now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves” (Matthew 14:15)*. Luke wrote virtually the same thing: *Now the day began to wear away, and the twelve came and said to him, “Send the crowd away to go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find lodging and get provisions, for we are here in a desolate place” (Luke 9:12)*. How do we reconcile these statements with John’s account? It is likely that both of these reports are true. Jesus posed the question to Philip early on. Then after a day of teaching and healing, the disciples themselves arrived at the same concern when the need became more obvious.

Now back to Jesus’ question to Philip. He asked Philip what He asked for good reason. On a practical front, Philip was from nearby Bethsaida. He would know where the best restaurants and deli’s would be. But, there are more important spiritual reasons why Jesus asked Philip this question. Philip needed to see God. A few months after this Philip would reveal his confusion or doubt by asking, *“Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us” (John 14:8)*. Philip’s question came at the doorstep of the crucifixion. By this time, Philip should have understood that Jesus was equal with the Father. Jesus’ answer to Philip’s question proves that point. *Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (John 14:9)*. Jesus knew that Philip

needed to learn that He is God. Therefore, Jesus graciously put him on the spot with a question that will be answered with a miracle that only God can do.

One thing for certain is that Jesus was not asking Philip for advice or information. *He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.* To *test* is to make a trial of something in order to ascertain its quality. In the case of an individual, testing is a process intended to prove the person's knowledge or his genuineness. In this case, we have a present tense verb which might indicate that Jesus regularly put the disciples to tests like this.

Most obvious is that Jesus wanted Philip to know Him. It is a wonderful display of our Lord's grace when He picks us out to put us to the test for the express purpose of revealing more and greater truth about Himself. Granted sometimes the tests are humiliating as they reveal how weak and unwise we can be. It can be almost as embarrassing as the teacher randomly asking us, in front of the whole class, the most difficult question which has an answer of which we are wholly unaware. But the purpose of God's test is never just to show that we are failures. The purpose of the test is to show how much God wants to teach us about Himself.

Philip answered Jesus' question like a human would be likely to answer it. *Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little"* (v.7). Philip estimated the size of the crowd which is what anyone would do in order to answer Jesus' question somewhat accurately. Based on the size of the crowd, Philip concluded that they would need about \$30,000 worth of food. Where did that figure come from? A denarii was a typical day's wage. If we arbitrarily choose a modern day's wage to be \$150, we arrive at the comparative figure of \$30,000. In other words, Jesus led Philip to conclude that there was no way possible for them to host this impromptu banquet. It's my guess that at this point Jesus dropped the issue, went about teaching the people, and then the other disciples suddenly realized they were faced with an impossible dilemma.

Some time later (it would seem), the same question came to the fore and Andrew had a different answer (vv.8-10). Probably he came forward with information as the disciples pondered how to solve the problem. John told us that *one of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's*

*brother, said to him* (v.8). Andrew wasn't one of the leading disciples. He was the brother of a leader disciple. Historically, Andrew is relatively unknown and deemed unimportant. But there is something about the work and personality of this guy who immediately brought his brother Peter to Jesus after he had found Him.

Andrew was the first of the twelve apostles who Jesus chose to follow Him. He is always listed with three other disciples (Peter, James, John) but is often not included in significant events to which Jesus took those other three. The other three were often outspoken or short of temper, but not Andrew. Andrew seemed to speak softly, always knew the right way to solve a problem, and seemed to say the right thing – at least this is the case the few times his words are recorded. For example, when “out-of-towners” (Greeks) requested to see Jesus, Philip took the matter to Andrew, who took the matter directly to Jesus (John 12:20-22). It seems odd that Philip would not go directly to Jesus himself, but apparently he knew something about Andrew's way of dealing with people.

Therefore, we are not surprised that Andrew knew about a boy with a lunch. *“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?”* (v.9). The implication is that Andrew brought the boy to Jesus just like he brought Peter to Jesus and the Greek men to Jesus. How did he even know that this boy had some food? Andrew was so relational that he just had to know people.

Notice that telling Jesus that this boy had a lunch with him is not the same as gossip. There is a strange tension in the Lord's work between avoiding gossip and knowing the need and who can meet the need. It would have been gossip for Andrew to say, “Yes, his name is Eli. He lives way over there in Cana. His dad is a sorry rascal who left the family a few weeks ago. Of course Eli's mom could stand to go on a diet. I would imagine that also had something to do with the break up.”

Andrew had a knack of quietly bringing people to Christ. His personality and work are a good example for us to emulate. I am sure that far more people are truly born again through one-on-one sharing of Christ than through mass crusades and public invitations. For example, Edward Kimball is virtually an unknown in history. He was a boy's Sunday School teacher. He was timid and soft-spoken. But

there was a boy who had come to his class who clearly needed Christ. Kimball determined to speak to the boy and headed for the Holton's shoe store. When he was nearly there, he started having second thoughts. What if he embarrassed the boy? What if after he left, the other clerks learned who he was and why he had talked to this boy? In fact, the man walked past the store before he realized it. Finally, he mounted all the courage he could, walked into the store, and found the boy in the stockroom putting shoes on the shelf. As Kimball recalled the event, he was not even sure what he said. He remembered he spoke with halting words and said something about Christ's love and by his own admission made a very weak appeal. But D. L. Moody received Christ as his Savior on the spot. And the rest is history. Surely we can be an Andrew or an Edward Kimball.

Andrew had some information about food, though it was hardly useful by human standards. No problem. Jesus would work His plan for His glory. *Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number (v.10).* God the Son was definitely in charge of things. He could have satisfied the hunger by speaking a word. But He had a plan that involved using mere humans to do His work for His own glory.

In short, Jesus told the disciples to get engaged. At first, they had told Jesus to send the people home. *But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat" (Matthew 14:16).* It was not necessary for the people to go away. The disciples just needed to feed the people. What?! Actually, the humans simply needed to get the people organized. They needed to tell the men to sit down. Apparently the women and children had to stand? Or did they get to eat at all? Yes. The number of 5,000 was the men, but the meal included women and children also. Matthew makes that point clear by writing, *And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children (Matthew 14:21).*

There is a lesson for the people here, and a lesson for us as well (vv.11-13). The lesson is that Jesus is our daily bread. *Jesus then 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 (v.11).* This is one of the most famous signs Jesus did to prove He is God. But the venue that Jesus chose says even more. He miraculously

satisfied the physical needs of the people. In doing so, Jesus called attention to His character as Satisfier of the necessary.

A few days after this, Jesus would engage the masses in a debate about His nature as the bread of life. He proved He was greater than Moses who the people presumed was responsible to give their forefathers manna in the wilderness (6:31). He requires those who trust Him to depend wholly on Him to provide what they need. When Jesus used the picture of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, it drove away many of the would-be followers (6:56). Jesus explained that feeding on Him alone is the means to eternal life (6:57). Why didn't these people remember the miracle of which they partook just days earlier? The miracle proved that Jesus is the Bread of eternal life.

Not only is Jesus sufficient to meet our spiritual needs, but as the picture shows, Jesus is more than sufficient to meet our needs. *And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten (vv.12-13).* Matthew wrote: *And they all ate and were satisfied (v.20).* It was Jewish custom to pick up the leftovers and not waste them. But this pictures more than saving the leftovers.

There were twelve baskets of fragments. That is way more than the boy gave Jesus to begin with. The number twelve has to be significant. It is a picture that Jesus Christ provides more than is necessary to satisfy the needs of the 12 tribes of Israel, the nation. *He came unto His own!* Also significant is that the baskets were full of broken pieces. What would we expect after multiplied thousands of people dug in? Yes, but how do we escape the picture of the "broken bread" being sufficient to meet the need? It is the exact picture Jesus will give in a few months of the broken bread representing His body "which is given for you." (Luke 22:9). As Luke also told us, *And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd (Luke 9:16).* Since the "Bread" is more than sufficient to meet all spiritual hungering, should we not be sharing the "Bread."

## **A Second Lesson: This is the promised King (vv.14-15).**

As a result of this miracle, the people concluded that Jesus was the promised Messiah (v.14). *When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" (v.14).* In the miracle the people saw reason to believe Jesus. This had to be the promised Prophet. That promise is found in the law where Moses promised, *The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers – it is to him you shall listen – just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, "Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die." And the LORD said to me, "They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him" (Deuteronomy 18:15-19).*

But were the people who enjoyed the miracle food really willing to listen to His words? Oh! Let's rejoice in their faith. That is just the reason why John wrote what he wrote, right? *But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:31).* But, what if their belief was not sincere?

Their belief must have been sincere because the people desired to make Jesus their king (v.15). *Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself (v.15).* Surely the desire to make Jesus king is an expression of faith. It depends on the object of the faith. If material provision is the object of faith, then faith is not genuine. They wanted a king who supplies entitlements, not a King to rule their hearts.

Jesus withdraws when He knows people are not sincere. It was not time for Him to become king. It would have been too early for a revolt or rebellion that embroiled Him with government officials. Besides as we shall learn, these people were not sincere.

The fact throughout this story of the miracle is that Jesus Christ is God. Because He is God, He is the Bread of life. Because He is the

Bread of life, He is the author and provider of eternal life. People who love themselves and are concerned only for their own welfare will not accept Christ as King of their lives. They want a genie or a divine ATM, not a Savior and King.