Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, August 2, 2026
"The Gifts in *Our* Hands"

The Message

Today's Gospel passage is one of the most widely known passages, even among people who are not actively Christian.

And of course in churches, we like to cite this story as a basis for our ministries.

At the heart of it, this story is about feeding people.

It is about hospitality and generosity, love and compassion, and it's a little bit about Jesus proving to his disciples and to the people who he is.

But this story is also about more than all of this. So let's dive in and take a closer look.

This story starts off by telling us that Jesus crossed Lake Galilee to try to go somewhere that he could be alone.

This is not the only time in his ministry that Jesus tries to take time for himself.

This is an important aspect of Jesus's life as well as his ministry, but it also emphasizes his devotion to prayer life and the balance needed between serving people and taking time to recharge.

This is an important reminder to all of us that alone time, prayer time, and solitude are necessary elements of a healthy spiritual life and a healthy life in ministry and service to others.

So, I appreciate that this story starts off with a note that Jesus was trying to take some time alone.

And, I also appreciate the next part of the story, which is that despite his attempt to be alone, the crowds of people followed him.

The story simply says that when Jesus got out of the boat, he saw the large crowd.

It doesn't really say if he got his alone time or not, but we can probably safely assume that the only alone time he got was in the boat.

And yet, he is filled with empathy and compassion for the people who are so desperate for healing, for answers, for teaching, and for kindness.

So he spends time with each person who needs it, healing and serving.

As the day turns into evening, the disciples realize that they have been out there all day serving people.

It's getting toward dinner time, and they are starting to be concerned about the fact that people are going to need to eat soon.

I suspect that in good faith, and out of concern for Jesus, for the people, and also likely for themselves, the disciples suggest that Jesus encourage the crowds to leave so they can go and buy some food in the surrounding villages.

But Jesus responds by suggesting that they feed the people themselves.

Of course, this is where the fame of this story comes into play.

The disciples tell Jesus that they only have five small loaves of bread and two fish.

My guess is that they only anticipated feeding themselves, and this was probably not even enough for them, at least in their minds.

But Jesus has different plans, so he takes the food they have, blesses it, breaks the bread and hands it to his disciples.

(Does this sound familiar to anyone? The theme of breaking bread and handing it out could be a whole sermon on its own, but that's for another day.)

The disciples presumably start passing the food around to people, and as it turns out, there is not only enough to feed everyone, but there is enough that they end up with a tremendous amount of leftover food.

The story claims to have fed 5000, but that only includes the men. If we factor in another 5000 women, and let's say two children for everyone two adults, we are talking about 20,000 people who were fed that day.

That's pretty amazing!

But the part of this story I think is the most amazing is not that the people were fed.

Jesus does that throughout his ministry, and while it is amazing work, I think the most amazing part of this story is the lesson in it for us.

Often this story is used in churches to talk about how we should be feeding people, caring for the poor, etc.

And I'm not saying we shouldn't be doing that! But there is another lesson here that I think is equally important for churches to keep in mind.

How often do we look to God for miraculous intervention when the gifts are, in fact, right there in our hands?

How often do we complain about what we *don't* have, or what we *used* to be able to do, and overlook the miraculous power of the gifts that we *do* have?

I think we tend to do this as individuals, but also as churches. And the lesson in this passage is that actually, what we do have is enough. We can do ministry with exactly the gifts we have right now.

Yes, perhaps it has changed over the years. Maybe we had more members, or more energy, or younger people, or more money, or more enthusiasm, or a better feel for the needs of the neighbourhood in years past.

Likewise, individually, maybe we were younger, stronger, more energetic, less burdened with the baggage of life, or more carefree in years past.

But we always have gifts at our disposal, even if those gifts are not the same gifts we used to have.

Let me give you an example.

When I was doing my CPE (clinical pastoral education), I was working in a continuing care retirement facility.

These types of facilities have independent living, assisted living, memory care units, and skilled nursing units.

I was working in the skilled nursing unit one day when I went in to visit a very elderly woman who was completely bed-ridden.

I had visited with her before, and I found her delightful.

Everyone who worked with her found her delightful.

As I was visiting with her, she was lamenting about the fact that she could no longer do much of anything. She could not even leave the bed to use the bathroom.

And she'd been in this position for over a year.

But, she turned to me with a smile on her face and she said, “you know, I ask myself often why I am still here. What purpose do I serve? I can’t contribute anything anymore…

“But then I think, well, maybe my purpose here is to bring a smile to all of your faces. I know not everyone here is easy to work with, but if I can be the person who cheers up the staff, maybe I can make other people’s lives just a little bit better.”

This woman had lost all of her skills. She was incredibly capable most of her life, and she had accomplished a lot in her younger years.

But this season of her life brought new lessons for her. And instead of wallowing in her inability, she tried to use the gifts she still had.

Sure, she may have had fewer gifts than she once had, but she still had lungs that allowed her to breathe, she still had facial muscles that allowed her to smile, and she still had a voice that allowed her to offer delightful words of wisdom to the caregivers around her.

The point here is this: Jesus showed us that rather than lamenting about the gifts we don’t have, or that we wish we had, we can recognize the gifts we *do* have and use those to do good in the world.

Sure, maybe things have changed over the years for our church.

Maybe we have had to let go of some things that we used to do.

But what gifts do we have? What is right in front of us, just waiting to be shared, multiplied, and offered in service to others?

God doesn’t see us or our church in terms of what we used to have or what we used to be able to do.

God sees us just as we are right now, and God loves us just the way we are right now.

And Jesus showed us that God wants us to use the gifts we have *now.*

So, as you leave here today, take with you this lesson from the story of the loaves and fishes.

Look at your life and your church just as they are now, and think about the gifts – both large and small – that are right in front of you.

And then, wonder how you might use those gifts to serve others, to serve God, and to demonstrate love, hospitality, compassion, kindness, and empathy to those around you.

Amen.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, we thank you for the gifts you have given us throughout our lives, and for those gifts that we have in our hands right now. We know that we are not always aware of the gifts we have in each moment, and that we spend a lot of time lamenting about the gifts we no longer have. Help us to notice all of the gifts in our lives - big and small - and to use them to do your work in this hurting world. In your holy name, we pray. Amen.