



Date: July 21-22, 2018

Speaker: Shane Simms – Pastor of Adult Discipleship

Scripture: Table Talk - Luke 9 - Hope

The generation in Newfoundland that preceded mine, was known for its large families. Many of the people that I knew, came from families that raised 12 or 13 children. Often, the houses weren't big, but there was lots of love to go around, and lots of food to go around. Often times the biggest piece of furniture in the house, was the kitchen table.

I know a person who was telling the story about his experience growing up in a large family with 12 or 13 kids. In his house, all the kids slept in one large room. If you want to talk about organized chaos, this would've been the perfect picture. After a long day of the kids playing outside, the mom was putting all the kids to bed. She was going through the process of tucking all the kids in and kissing them all good night, but one child in particular just wouldn't stop crying. You would think that will be a normal occurrence in a house with 13 kids all sleeping in one big room, but this particular night, the one kid just would not let up. So, doing what any good parent would do, she goes over, and of course it's a little dark, so she can't see so well, and she says to this little child, "*you need to settle down now it's time to go to sleep*". To which the little boy replies, "*I don't want to go to sleep, I don't live here, I want to go home!*" You know there are too many kids around, when you are putting other people kids to bed by accident!

How do you care for, how do you be host to, how do you feed 13 kids every single day? The microwave dinners that Paul talked about last weekend, would not cut it in any of these homes. With so many kids around, being the consummate host and the caregiver, required a lot of creativity, even if it meant putting someone else's kids to bed by accident once in a while!

Last weekend, Paul talked about a last-minute meal

that Mary and Martha prepared for Jesus and his 12 disciples. So, this unexpected meal that was dropped spontaneously on these two sisters, forced them to scatter and prep for 13 or so people. We see that Mary took the opportunity to sit and learn from Jesus, much to the disapproval of Martha who was consumed with scurrying around and making sure all the preparations were just right.

So, our stories from last week to this week shifts from a person prepping a meal for 13 or so people, to a person prepping for a much larger sitting audience. The amount of hungry people wanting to be fed in today's tale goes from a table of 13-15, to a table of 5000-7000. If you thought it was stressful for Mary and Martha preparing for 13 other people, imagine the disciples of Jesus trying to prep a meal on the spot for 5 to 7000 people. I would imagine that many if not most of you have heard this story about Jesus feeding the 5000. It's really a great story.

This story, is a really cool story, so cool is this story, that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all tell it. We kind of know the story from Jesus' point of view, and we know it from the disciple's point of view, but we never really hear from the perspective of one of the 5000 people in the story. I wonder, what were they thinking. I wonder what their thoughts might have been as this massive buffet meal unfolded. I'd like to find out. So, engage your imagination for a few moments and listen to a 2000 years old character as he talks to us from a place called Bethsaida, otherwise known as the "house of fish". Let's go there!

Most days when you wake up, you just think it is likely going to be just another ordinary day. A day of regular rhythms and routines, sights and sounds,

people and places. But these days, there is something in the air around these parts of Israel. People have been talking a lot the last couple of weeks in all the towns and villages around here—every small town has its rumor mill right? These days, there really is something strange happening. This all started with this group of people going around—12 to 13 of them probably, traveling village to village to village, and in the beginning, it was kind of a non-story, we thought probably just some more people peddling some false Roman government propaganda. But, we were about to learn that this, this was something different, very different.

This rogue band of teachers, were not just teaching “stuff”, not like some wayward wandering prophets that we often times have running crazy around here, no, no...they made a new claim, a different claim, an audacious claim. Their spin? They were telling all the people that they had authority to...heal the sick....so now, they had everyone’s attention.

And when you are sick, and someone claims to have authority to heal you, what do you think people did? People flocked to them, crowds got crazy real fast. Blind people, people who were born crippled, kids who were ravished with leprosy, people on their death beds.....it was madness. And the crazy thing is... people got better. I saw one person who was a leper for 20 years, nobody touched that person for 20 years, leave one of those healing gatherings, as clean and innocent as they day he was born.....hard to process....these guys, who called themselves “apostles”, had something real.

It’s only so much of this one can watch without asking the question everyone started asking, “how are these guys able to do this? Who gave these guys authority to do this? Did they get this power from an evil spirit? Did this authority come from a sorcerer?” As you listened to their teaching, you learned really quickly where they claimed this authority came from. Not from a sorcerer, not from the Romans, not from an evil spirit, but from a man they called Jesus. This Jesus, must obviously have a connection to something, or someone. These days proved to be some of the most intriguing and amazing days in our towns and villages in years, with the days of teaching and healings, and then, all of a sudden, these apostles just left, gone, but we

wanted more, and whoever this Jesus guy is, we needed to learn more of this story.

You know, word travels fast in a small towns doesn’t it? It didn’t take long for us to find out where these apostles had went so suddenly. The word on the street was that they had left to report the progress of their healing/teaching campaign to their master, to their teacher, this guy Jesus. This was our opportunity! This was everyone’s opportunity! If these guys could heal people, what could this Jesus guy do! ? Well, we were about to find out!

It didn’t take long for us to track them, we discovered that these apostles and this Jesus were spotted heading towards a local town called Bethsaida, which is a place that has more fish than you have ever seen in your life. A real fishing spot! And when we found out, we passed the word everywhere. You should have seen the people...the sick, the hungry, the outcast, the poor, we were running to get to Bethsaida, I have never seen so many people before, move so fast! But, if what we saw in our towns and villages in the last few days was any indication, something spectacular was about to happen, and nobody, I mean nobody, not even me, nobody wanted to miss this.

We ran so fast, many of us even got to Bethsaida before the apostles did. I don’t know if those apostles were ready for what they got when they got to Bethsaida. So many of us were already there, waiting, eager, some of us frantic, it was chaos in a way I had never seen it....crowds of people, men, women, kids, thousands of us, all waiting to see what these apostles were going to do next, and who this Jesus guy really was, if he was “nothing”, or if he was “something...”

I wondered how these apostles and how this Jesus character would deal with this mob like following. I mean, I know we crashed their private party kind of thing, surely they didn’t want us around. I mean, I was in this crowd, I wouldn’t want this kind of attention. Reflecting back, it must have been so overwhelming. Then, I caught my first glimpse of...Him This surely was the guy these apostles were talking about. He was just kind of an everyday looking person, but he seemed to have an engaging presence about him that just drew people in to Him.

He was able to deal with people throning him with patience that was surprising, and he was able to talk to and be fully connected with many people one on one. He was kind of a.. like... a shepherd, that was my first take of Him. Loving, caring, patient. Maybe we were like his flock or something.....it's the first time many of us would have ever had anyone listen to or care for us.

And even though he didn't appear to have "authority", I mean he didn't look like a stern-faced King or an angry, yelling prophet, he definitely had something. When he taught, as he spoke about what he called was God's Kingdom, you could tell, he was connected to something in a way that nobody had ever seen before. His words weren't empty. You could tell that he more than knew "what he was talking about", it was like He "was what he was talking about". He definitely spoke in a way that I had never heard a man speak before- as one with true authority.

And then, he just started moving through the crowds and doing what his apostles had been doing in the villages. He healed people. I mean, he healed everyone he could touch. It was amazing. Have you ever seen a sick person, get well, right in front of your very eyes? Have you ever seen a person with leprosy lose their spots right in front of you? Have you ever seen a person who had never heard one word in their life, instantly begin to hear speech and children playing and the birds singing for the first time ever? Have you ever seen someone who in one moment, was stretched out on a death bed, basically ready and prepped for the grave, just suddenly, get up, and be better? Well, seeing that would change you. Being in the orbit of this Jesus, experiencing his strange, powerful, but gentle authority and his generous healing, began to have an effect on me.

You could just take in his teaching and not notice the time pass away. You could just watch person after person, broken people, hurting people, sick people, lonely people, be invited, loved, and restored by this Jesus...it was the most beautiful thing one could ever see and time would slip by unawares and it was as if time didn't exist.

And I guess that's what happened, time slipped by. The day turned to evening, the sun began to set, a chill settled in the air, and you could tell that the

apostles were tired, weary, and hungry. All day long with this mob, would take its toll on everyone. And it was also having its toll on us. Rumbles of hunger went through the crowd, some of us had not eaten all day, others of us, the very poor amongst us, had not just not eaten today, we had not eaten....for many days....I was one of those people.

And then, the hunger began to take many of us over and the apostles began to panic. They saw that we were not leaving and that many of us were demanding food. And then, a sudden thrust of people, a mad mob, surrounded the apostles and their leader and I guess then the apostles knew, they were in trouble.

The apostles were scrambling, it looked like the only calm one out of the whole bunch was this Jesus figure. Then, within earshot of a bunch of us, one of Jesus' lead guys says to him, "We need to send these people away. They want food. We cannot give them food. This will not be Jesus. Send them away. Let's send them away.....NOW".

And I mean, I could understand it....it made sense. These apostles had been in our villages teaching and healing for days, and then they try and get this quiet place of connection with their lead guy and then they are interrupted by 5000 of us just wanting more and more and more from them....but this is not going to end well. Send us away.....yeah right....where did they think we were honestly going to go??? Where did they think we were going to go?

Then, their Jesus leader, seems to know what's happening and I think he undoubtedly felt the pressure of the moment. It looked to me as though the apostles knew there was no way to send us away, so it looked to me as though they were just going to make a run for it. The apostle guys had been chatting under their breath with their leader, and they were doing all the talking, he was just listening. Then, he speaks, and the escape plan is about to be revealed. Only, it was not an escape plan that I saw coming, and it was definitely not one his disciples saw coming. As he looked at his apostles, he says, with certainty, confidence, and challenge, "*we are not going anywhere....you give them something to eat...*"

You, give them something to eat... you 12, feed these 5000. You few, feed these many...you who are inconvenienced, feed these who are struggling...you who are thinking about your own needs, feed those who are truly needy.

Wow, game on....you could tell these apostles wanted nothing to do with this plan. Their hospitality marathon had ended and they were ready to move on from us. They had maxed out their compassion on us. They were ready to move on....but their leader, clearly was not.

Then, the apostles, once they got over the shock of their leaders request, it was as if they were staring at each other and sending these non-verbal messages to each other to say, "We think that Jesus has lost his mind..." And then, they tried to bring Jesus back to reality with the most obvious reason why this attempt at mob hospitality should be avoided.

One of them, I heard it with my own ears, in frustration, just blurts out, "We have only 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish, and they aren't even ours, they belong to a little boy I saw amongst the crowd". "*I don't even know if he still has them....but even if he does, and we can use them, how do you expect us to feed these people. Come on Jesus, it's time for us to cut ourselves loose here and flee for cover....*"

Those of us in the crowd who were close enough to hear this, were hanging on every word. "*You, give them, something to eat...*" "*I saw a little boy with 5 pieces of bread and 2 fish...*" These guys must be crazy- at least their leader is. The apostles want to cut their losses and move on, but this Jesus leader, he just wants to stay and love and teach and heal, even when his students want to move on and use their excuse to get to meeting their own need. I learned something about this Jesus guy in those moments. He seemingly never gets tired of being with those who need him, those like me; he always invites, even when his followers have plenty of good ideas why they should be doing something else.

And by now, the crowds were pressing in, I mean, it was getting uncomfortably close. People shoulder to shoulder, angry, needy, hungry, kids who were crying, people who were pressing. I was doing my level best to keep my wits about me, but this

became a tense situation with a mob who were needy on all kinds of levels, and now, many who heard this Jesus leader saying they were going to be fed, were now becoming very anxious and demanding. As I watched and surveyed what was happening, knowing the facts as Jesus' guys had laid them out, this was going to end terribly.

Then, Jesus just starts pointing, here, there, over there, and suddenly, the mob who were pressing and pushing and crowding, are all finding their places, sitting in groups, on the grass, about 50 of us in a group, and it seemed, in a few moments, order had been restored. In my group, everyone was sitting, wondering, waiting, what is this Jesus character going to do next. And whatever it was, it better be big, because this was a mob about to do something desperate. Desperate people do desperate things.

And in what seemed to be only a few moments, I looked to the top of the hill on the grassy expanse where we were all sitting, and I saw Jesus, and he is about to say something. Everyone is sitting, calmed, and attentive. And Jesus is standing, about to say something, we thought that the teaching was finished, but apparently not.

Then, as we waited, rather than going back to one of his lessons about his father's Kingdom, he lifts the 5 loaves, and the 2 fish towards the sky. I guess the little boy didn't mind after all giving up the little bit of food he had. And rather than saying, "Behold, this is all the food I have, so please forgive us, and find your way to the nearest village", he raised them to heaven, and said, "*Father, in this place called Bethsaida, in this place so named the house of fish, I thank you for this fish you have provided, and I thank you that you will make this a house of fish that will feed all of your children who are dwelling here in this moment. Amen...*"

At first, many of us thought, this must be a joke, a cruel joke, an inhumane joke to the most needy people anywhere. But then, the apostles walked, from group to group, from needy people to needy people, with the fish and the bread that Jesus had prayed for and had broken into pieces. And they never seemed to run out! They walked and walked, they fed and fed. People had to their full. The hospitality was passed from basket to hand, from hand to mouth, from mouth to stomach. I had never

seen anything like it. If there was any such thing as a miracle, this was it. If there was any such thing as hospitality, this was it. If there was any such thing as caring for the least of society, this was it. If there was such thing as loving, gracious invitation, this was it.

And when I thought things couldn't get any more amazing, into the late watches of the evening, as everyone dispersed and went home. I saw the apostles walking, collecting, putting food into baskets. There was food leftover, and in that moment, I learned something about Jesus, more than I did about food. I learned, that with Jesus, there is never going to be scarcity. He is abundant in resource. He is a gracious host, who will never use an excuse to get away from loving people who need him.

In those last few moments, as we were all leaving, I heard Jesus say to the apostles, "gather up the broken pieces which are left over. That nothing should be lost." I think in a weird kind of way, we were the broken pieces, the people. And this was his way of making sure, that none of us were lost."

North Park, the tables that Jesus spent his time at were amazing places. Small tables of a few people, and massive tables with thousands of people. At this table, there are many resounding lessons. Hopefully the Holy Spirit has already taught you one of them as you have engaged this here today.

This story, teaches us....Jesus always welcomes, Jesus hosts, despite inconveniences. He is not the host who hosts when it works for him. After a full day of teaching and healing, he sticks into the story and builds a table of invitation and hosts despite being tired after giving all day. He hosts even despite the pressure by his followers to "send the crowds away"- his own followers. He hosts despite the apparent problem at hand, "too many people, not enough resource....let's pass on this".

Jesus calls us, as his apostles, as his disciples, to set the tables of hospitality for people, and not be over-focused on the things we think we need. Jesus says, the only thing you need, is a heart of hospitality, even and especially, when it is inconvenient.

Today, maybe you are like one of the crowd. There is something that has caused you to be curious, something that has caused you to want to know more, something that has caused you to draw closer. Thanks for gathering at this table today, I trust that you have felt the welcome of Jesus here. He always will welcome you. He exists to welcome you. He is the consummate host. Today, he invites you to take one step closer to His kingdom. His heart, his passion, is to "gather up the broken pieces that are left over, that none should be lost..."

### **Points to Ponder**

#### **Table Talk ~ Luke 9 ~ Hope**

**With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.**

- 1.** The feeding of the 5000 may be one of Jesus' most famous recorded miracles. If you've heard this story before, what is the major truth that this story has taught you?
- 2.** Opportunities to offer hospitality to others often happen spontaneously, and are not always convenient! Is there a time you can recall an opportunity to offer some "inconvenient hospitality"? How did it go?
- 3.** In this story, Jesus' followers are not as eager to offer hospitality to the crowd. There are a couple of excuses that they use to "take a pass" on this "mass hosting". What things hold you back from offering "inconvenient hospitality"?
- 4.** Jesus often uses these moments of "inconvenient hospitality" to accomplish something beautiful. Has there been a time where you have experienced this "unexpected beauty" in your life?