

Summary of the Sermon: *Wilderness Banquet*

Rev. Jonathan Murray's message centers on two biblical stories of hunger—the Hebrew people in the wilderness and the crowd of 5,000 fed by Jesus—and uses them to explore fear, trust, stewardship, and the meaning of sharing tables.

The sermon opens with the Gospel reading of Jesus feeding the 5,000, highlighting the disciples' practical concern: "*We have only five loaves of bread and two fish...*" and Jesus' surprising command: "*You give them something to eat.*" This becomes the foundation for the message: scarcity is often our first instinct, but God invites us to begin with what we already have.

Rev. Murray connects this to the Exodus story, where hunger makes the Hebrew people nostalgic for Egypt and doubtful of God's provision. Hunger, he notes, makes people "cranky... unreasonable... grumbling at best," and fear convinces them there won't be enough. Yet God provides manna daily—not abundance stored up, but enough for each day—teaching trust rather than anxiety about tomorrow.

Turning to the church's present moment, Rev. Murray names the familiar fear that arises during stewardship season: "*Seriously, Jesus, is there going to be enough?*" But stewardship, he insists, begins not with fear but gratitude—recognizing what God has already placed in our hands: people, building, kitchen, tables, volunteers, teachers, listeners, organizers, prayers, welcomers, time, experience, and above all, a God who has never stopped providing.

He emphasizes that Jesus doesn't ask the disciples to produce a miracle—only to participate in it. Likewise, the church is not asked to solve every problem or manufacture abundance, but to join what God is already doing. The community dinner becomes a living example: beautifully set tables, real plates, nutritious meals, and conversations that communicate dignity—"*You matter. I see you.*" The Kingdom of God, he says, is not a food pantry but a banquet where hungry people are not projects but guests.

Rev. Murray expands hunger beyond food: people hunger for belonging, dignity, friendship, hope, and to be seen. The church's calling is not only to feed but to share tables, build relationships, and learn from those at the margins. And we, too, come hungry—for grace, peace, forgiveness, healing, and hope.

The sermon culminates in the detail that after the feeding, *twelve baskets* of leftovers remain—one for each disciple. Those who feared scarcity end up carrying abundance. The miracle is not only that thousands were fed, but that the disciples learned God's provision exceeds their fear.

Rev. Murray closes with two invitations:

1. **A willingness to share what we have.**
2. **A willingness to trust the God who provides**—for the hungry around us, the hungry within us, and the wilderness places where we cannot yet see a way forward.

Amen.

Transcript

Listen now for the reading of the Gospel.

When the apostles returned, they told everything to Jesus they had done.

Then Jesus took them with him to a town called Bethsaida, where they could be alone together.

But the people learned where Jesus went and followed him.

He welcomed them and talked with them about God's Kingdom and healed those who needed to be healed.

Late in the afternoon, the 12 disciples came to Jesus and said send the people away.

They need to go to the towns and countryside around here and find places to sleep and something to eat because no one lives in this place.

But Jesus said to them.

You give them something to eat, they said we have only 5 loaves of bread and two fish unless we go buy food for all these people.

There were about 5000 men there.

Jesus said to his disciples, tell the people to sit in groups of about 50 people.

So the disciples did this and all the people sat down.

Then Jesus took the five loaves of bread and two fish, and looking up to heaven, he thanked God for the food, and he divided the food, gave it to the disciples to give to the people.

They all ate and were satisfied, and what was leftover was gathered up filling 12 baskets.

This is the word of the Lord.

God is still speaking, please be seated.

So I'm going to begin with a question today and I'm hoping you'll answer.

What comes to mind when you hear the word hungry?

Food.

Stomach

lunch.

Dinner.

Might as well get breakfast in there too.

Yeah, all of those things, sure.

You can think bacon.

There's always room for bacon, right?

When you think about the feeding, that hunger, you might be thinking about that feeling in your stomach when you haven't eaten all day.

Maybe you would think about hunger in terms of the child who goes to school without breakfast.

Maybe you think about someone who has to choose between buying groceries and paying the utility bill.

Or perhaps hunger for you isn't about food at all.

Maybe you're hungry for companionship.

Forgiveness.

Hungry for peace.

Hungry for purpose?

Well, the Bible stories that we read today begin with hungry people.

The Hebrew people are hungry in the wilderness.

The crowds following Jesus are hungry in a deserted place, as the scripture said, where no one lives.

And in both stories, there's a temptation to believe there isn't enough.

There's not enough food, there's not enough resources, there's not enough money, there's not enough time, there's not enough people, there's not enough energy.

And in the midst of that fear.

God's Word to us asks us to consider a different possibility.

What if we began with what God has placed in our hands?

In Exodus, the Hebrew people have left Egypt.

They have experienced God's deliverance, but now in the wilderness, they are hungry.

What happens?

To people when we are hungry.

Louder.

Cranky nailed it.

Unreasonable.

Grumbling at best.

They do too.

They remember Egypt.

Not accurately, but nostalgically.

At least we had food there.

So we're told there's some 400 years of praying for deliverance and now they would rather return to slavery, ***** with food and full stomachs rather than be free in the wilderness and trust God.

I guess people haven't changed all that much.

But hunger can do that to us.

It can make us afraid, and that fear can make us forget.

Did God know what God was doing?

Is there enough?

Then in the Gospel story, Jesus and the disciples have gone away to this deserted place, but the crowds follow them.

Jesus being who he is, he welcomes them.

He teaches them, He heals those who need healing, and when it becomes late into the day, the disciples come to Jesus with a very practical suggestion.

Send them away.

In other words, Jesus ministry for the day is done, the people are hungry, they need to go find food.

And we know Jesus response.

You give them something to eat.

Can you imagine being one of the disciples there?

In that moment you see thousands of people.

You look out, you see your five loaves of bread and your two fish.

I'd be looking back at Jesus.

Seriously.

Tell you what.

Roughly 100 people here today.

Look, I've got a mint in my pocket.

It's going to feed all of us.

You want us to feed them, Jesus?

Seriously.

And maybe that sounds familiar.

Because every year about this time of year, the church begins looking toward preparing the next year's fiscal budget.

We look at the needs around us, we look at our congregation, we look at the budget, we look at what we have and we ask that same question.

Seriously, Jesus, is there going to be enough?

But Jesus doesn't say don't worry about the need.

Jesus doesn't say you don't need to do anything.

He says you give them something to eat.

And that's where stewardship really begins.

It begins not with fear about whether there will be enough.

It begins with gratitude for what God has already placed in our hands.

So as we begin our stewardship for this coming fiscal year, we're not asking how much can we raise.

The deeper question that we're really asking what has God placed in our hands and how might we offer it for God's work?

Because.

Our financial gifts are only one part of our offering.

We also give of our time, our talents, our prayers, our creativity, our presence, our willingness to serve.

5 loaves and two fish may not look like much when we're staring at 5000 hungry people, but in the hands of Jesus, what looks insufficient becomes enough.

That doesn't mean that we give without thought or without planning.

It means we resist letting fear influence what we plan to give.

We give faithfully because we trust that God is faithful.

We plan faithfully because the ministries of Christ through this church matter.

And we give generously because we believe that what God has entrusted to us.

Can multiply and become a blessing farther than we can see or even conceive.

So I want us to be thinking.

But what do we have?

And what might God do with it?

The miracle of the feeding of the 5000 began when someone willingly trusted that what they have, they willingly trusted it to Jesus's hands.

And that's really a good definition of stewardship, taking what God has given us.

Placing it in Christ's hands and trusting God with what happens next.

Imagine if Jesus were standing here in front of us today.

I hope you do that every week, but especially in this moment.

Are there?

And you look around and there's hungry people.

Around you.

People in this community.

People in our neighborhood.

People sitting in this sanctuary.

People that we know.

People that we don't know.

People whose hunger is obvious.

And people whose hunger is hidden.

Jesus looks at us and says you give them something to eat.

What's your first thought there?

Anybody.

My first response, my first thought.

I don't think there's going to be enough.

I want there to be.

But I don't know, 5 loaves, 2 fish, thousands of people.

The math doesn't work.

And that's often where we stop.

We look at the size of the problem and we compare it with the size of our resources and we conclude not enough.

But notice Jesus asks them to look at what they already have.

What do we already have?

What does FPCL already have?

People, what else?

Building, yes.

What else?

Talent, yes.

Newly installed for those of you who are new here today.

Yes, we have AC and we are very grateful.

We have a kitchen.

I put a lot of thought into this.

We have a kitchen.

We have the people, we have a building.

We have tables, we have volunteers, we have food, we have teachers, we have people who know how to listen.

We have people who know how to organize.

We have people who know how to pray.

We have people who know how to welcome.

We have people with time.

We have people who have experience.

But most importantly, what we have.

We have a God who has never stopped providing.

Looking at the world's hunger.

Looking at the nation's hunger, looking at this community's hunger, it's easy to say what we have is not enough.

On Thursdays, people of the community come to our door.

They get a bag of food, they get a bus pass, they get an ARC voucher.

Those are good.

Those are necessary.

That matters.

But Jesus response to hunger goes deeper and invites us to go deeper.

Because what Jesus does in this deserted place is he creates a community around that meal.

Luke tells us that Jesus has people sit down in groups.

And then Jesus takes what's available.

He blesses it, He breaks it, He gives it to the disciples, and the disciples give it to the people.

The disciples don't produce the miracle.

But they do participate in it.

And that's what it means for the church today to feed the hungry.

We don't have to solve every problem.

We don't have to save the world.

We don't have to manufacture abundance.

We are invited to participate in what God is already doing.

Think about the Hebrew people here in the wilderness.

They ask, why doesn't God give us what we had before?

These pots of meat.

And bread.

But God doesn't give them what they had before.

Quail that night, but then God gives them manna.

Every day.

And that manna every day teaches them something deeper.

Than where their next meal comes from.

It teaches them trust.

Tomorrow's bread will come tomorrow.

Today's provision is enough for today.

And that's one of the hardest lessons for us.

We want to know, we want to plan, we want to calculate.

Will there be enough for tomorrow?

Will there be enough money, enough volunteers, enough energy, enough people, enough resources, enough faith, enough for the church, enough for my family, Enough for me?

And trust says God says, trust me with today.

I want to imagine, I want us together to imagine this table a little differently because a table is not simply a place where food is served.

A table is a place where people are seen.

A table says you belong here.

The table says there is a place for you.

The table says you don't have to be hungry alone.

And that is part of the church's calling.

Not simply to feed people at the margins, but to share people, share tables with people who have been pushed to the margins.

Not simply to give something to people, but to build relationships with people.

Not simply to ask how can we help them, but even ask what can we learn from them.

And that's the tables of our community dinner.

Month after month we host dinner at tables.

With beautiful decor.

Real plates, Metal flatware.

Well planned, nutritious, delicious meal for any and all who come.

It's a following of Jesus command.

You give them something to eat, but more than simply food, relationships are formed.

Conversations are shared that say you matter, I see you.

Because the Kingdom of God is not a food pantry.

It's a banquet.

And it God's banquet, those who are hungry are not projects, they're guests.

Who were the hungry people that you notice?

Because there's people who are physically hungry, yes.

But there's also people who hunger for belonging.

Hunger for dignity, for friendship.

Those are there are people who hunger for hope.

Hungry for someone to say I see you?

In fact, that was the exact response to one of our community members on a Thursday.

Guests had come up, needed some basic resources, and after receiving those resources, shared part of her story.

And they were told.

You matter.

I see you.

It was clear it had been a long time.

Since that message was spoken or even conveyed as the person collapsed in tears.

Hunger.

What would you offer that could become part of God's provision?

Money.

Talent, skill, time, a willingness to invite someone to dear, a listening ear.

But you also have to remember, where are you hungry?

Where are you willing?

And are you willing to trust God where you are hungry?

Because we aren't simply feeding the hungry, we are hungry people too.

We come to this table.

Hungry.

Hungry for grace, hungry for peace, hungry for forgiveness, hungry for healing, hungry for hope.

And Jesus says come.

The hymn that follows the sermon is one that we've sung some for everyone born, but it speaks so beautifully to this particular gospel story.

Him reminds us that God's table is not meant for a select few.

Or for the worthy.

Otherwise we wouldn't be invited.

There is a place at God's table for everyone born, a place where justice and peace, mercy and love, welcome and belonging takes root.

And that's what Jesus is doing in that wilderness.

He sees thousands of hungry people and says give them something to eat.

The disciples see scarcity and Jesus sees a table that can be shared.

The disciples see 5 loaves, 25 bread loaves and two fish, and Jesus sees the possibility of feeding everyone.

What will it take for us to see what God sees?

Because the table of Jesus is not a table of scarcity.

It's a table where everyone has a place, whether hungry or lonely.

Stranger, the person on the margins, the person who has plenty, the person who has little
For everyone born a place at the table.

And perhaps that is what our stewardship is ultimately about.

Not simply keeping the church operating for another year.

But hoping to create a table where more people can experience, can encounter God's welcome.

God's love, God's abundance.

And then comes.

One of the most beautiful details in this story, and maybe you've thought about it, maybe you haven't.

After everyone has eaten.

After everyone has gotten their fill.

There's 12 baskets leftover.

12.

One for each of the disciples.

Those who thought there wasn't enough are carrying baskets of leftovers.

The disciples were hungry too, and Jesus fed their hunger.

The miracle wasn't only that 5000 people ate and were filled.

The miracle was also what the disciples learned that God's provision is greater than our scarcity.

Our fear of scarcity, much less the disciples, began with empty hands.

They ended up carrying evidence of God's abundance.

I wonder if Jesus wants us to learn that lesson too.

Take what seems insufficient, bless it, break it open and share it.

Because there's always reasons to say there isn't enough.

But Jesus keeps asking, what do you have?

And then just takes Jesus takes what we bring.

And somehow, mysteriously, faithfully, there's enough.

Not because we are sufficient.

Not because the church has unlimited resources.

We know we don't.

Not because we know what tomorrow will bring, but because God is faithful.

So when we leave this place today, I hope we'll carry two things with us.

A willingness to share what we have.

A willingness to trust.

The God who provides.

For the hungry around us.

For the hungry within us, for the places in our lives that feel like a wilderness, and for the places where we cannot see a way forward.

May we trust the one who carries us?

Amen.