

# *What Can You Do with Too Little?*

*John 6: 1-15*

**First Presbyterian Church  
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Gerrit Scott Dawson**

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In the 1980's, Katherine Dunham felt that our church needed a chapel. Between the sanctuary and the education building would be the perfect place. She approached the elders with the offer to fund entirely the construction of this new worship space. The only stipulation was that the chapel would be built according to Ms. Dunham's specifications. She hired famous local architect Hays Town to design the chapel to look as if it had always been here, all the way down to the antiqued bricks. Katherine chose the artist for the stained glass and even had final say over what would be represented in the windows. The result is a chapel of exquisite beauty, a place of solace and inspiration. Through the last thirty years we have gathered in the chapel for weddings, funerals, children's church, teaching, private prayer and weekly communion.

It was not long into my ministry when I realized the significance of the stained glass window placed next to the pulpit. It comes right out of today's story from John 6. Jesus had crossed the Sea of Galilee to the remote regions on the east side. A huge crowd had followed on foot around the lake. Jesus grew concerned that this multitude would be hungry. His disciples scouted the available resources. Andrew found a boy who had with him five loaves and two fish. The image in our stained glass shows the little boy offering to Jesus the two fish on a string and the five loaves on a plate. Jesus is looking kindly at the boy. Both his eyes are focused on the lad offering what little he had in service to feeding so great a multitude. Jesus makes the ancient sign of blessing over the boy. He blesses him for offering what he had. With his other hand, Jesus gestures with open palm toward heaven. He offers acknowledgement to his Father as the source of all good gifts.

Through this meeting of heaven and earth in Jesus' hands, the miracle occurred. Jesus received the human offering of bread and fish with grateful blessing acceptance. Jesus drew down the power of heaven by looking with thanksgiving to his Father in heaven. Jesus himself was the nexus, the center, the heart where the multiplication of the loaves and fish took place.

I have often wondered if Katherine Dunham intentionally placed this scene by the pulpit. How many times it has been significant to me! Right before going to the pulpit to dare to read the Word of God, I see this offering of a little boy.

“Lord, I have not even five loaves and two fish with which to feed this chapel full of people hungry for you. I have but meager words. I offer them to you. Multiply them by your power and for your glory.” This window inspires me to remember the words George Herbert prayed before preaching, “Lord, teach thou me that I may teach them. Feed thy people with thy love.” Modern translation: I got nothin’. You have it all. Flow your Word in power through my tepid composition, so that they may feed not on me but you.

The image is of a boy offering five loaves and two fish to Christ in order that he might feed the multitude. *This is the end of pride*: all I have, no matter how strong or great it might seem is as nothing compared to the need of the world. *This is the end of self-denigration*: what little I have can be multiplied by your power to feed others to the point of being filled with more left over. I offer what I have in humble request that you do with this what you see fit. Receive the glory. Nourish your sheep. Redeem the world.

I hope that already you are considering that this is not just about preachers and teachers of the Word. This story is about any and all of us. God gives us life, and in this life he gives us some measure of faith. He gives us some measure of talent. He gives us some measure of resources. The greatest of which is but an eye dropper falling into the ocean of the world’s need. The least of which can be multiplied in the power and blessing of Christ to be of eternal significance. *Weakness is no barrier to usefulness. Strength is no guarantee of it.*

How does this work? I think it might be helpful to look backwards to a passage from John 5 which we did not take up last week. Jesus was in a dispute with the religious authorities over his healing of a lame man on the Sabbath. In his explanation, he shocked them further by declaring his unity with his Father in heaven in purpose, in judgment, in the giving of life itself. It seemed like the height of blasphemy to them that a mere man was claiming such intimacy and equality with the LORD God himself.

As the dispute went on, Jesus said to them, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”

Jesus’ opponents loved the Word of God. They studied it constantly. They tried to obey every aspect of the law. But somehow, they had missed the point. No doubt they knew the prophecies that the LORD would come to his people. They knew the songs of the Suffering Servant who would take away his people’s sins.

They knew of the coming Messiah who would break the chains of oppression and usher in the Kingdom of God. Surely they had memorized the words of Moses in Deuteronomy: “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” (Deut. 18: 15).

A prophet would come someday to do what Moses did: lead his people out of Egypt to the Promised Land. Out of slavery to sin and into the freedom of obedience. Out of the bondage of the Romans and into the Kingdom of God. Out of the grip of death into everlasting life. They were looking for him, but they could not see that Jesus was the Prophet foretold to them. They really couldn't believe it could be an ordinary guy from the outlying town of Nazareth.

They searched the Scriptures because they believed that in them could be found eternal life. They were right. In God's Word, even “just” in the Old Testament, are the very words that lead to everlasting life. Because, Jesus outrageously declared, these Scriptures point to him! The secret to everlasting life buried in God's Word is Jesus, God in the flesh come among you. He is the fulfillment of the deepest cries of the human heart. He is the goal of the most far reaching promises in the scrolls. It's all in Christ, but most of the people missed it.

And the problem is not intellectual. It's not a failure in your schooling. It's not really about some secret scholarly knowledge you lack. There is a deeper problem. God's people know his Word, but don't really want to do it. We want the blessings of God without the demands of the relationship. For some of us, that means we say, “Just tell me what to do. Give me the Step by Step Biblical principles but don't make me work to know you in your glory. Don't ask me to learn your heart by stretching my mind.” For others of us, we want the promises without the requirements. “Sure I want Jesus to come back but not just yet, at least not until I finish my vacation. Let me try life on my own terms a while longer. I think I can do it without the humiliation of needing a savior.”

So Jesus told them, “Yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.” God came down to us in Jesus Christ. He stood among us in flesh and blood. He stretched out his arms in love. But many, even most, of us declined. Jesus said, “Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” But we would not. We would not bow the head or bend the knee. We would rather not admit we can't do it ourselves.

Jesus' words echo what the prophet Isaiah recorded. The LORD spoke,

I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me;  
I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me.  
I said, "Here I am, here I am,"  
to a nation that was not called by my name.  
I spread out my hands all the day  
to a rebellious people,  
who walk in a way that is not good,  
following their own devices (Isaiah 65: 1-2).

We see how much the LORD our God loves us. He humbles himself to spread out his hands to us and say, "Here I am, Here I am!" I imagine a scene where a parent spreads out loving arms to a toddler with a defiant look on his face. The little tike is tired and miserable but stubborn. "Come to me," the parent calls. "No, no, no!" screams the toddler.

The Scriptures contain the secret to eternal life that begins now. That secret is an open one. All the prophecies point to Jesus as the fulfillment of God's plan to save us and remake the world. Jesus showed his Father's intent by the wonderful signs of healing he performed. He spoke his Father's intent by his words. He did not hide. He came into the midst of the people. Here I am! Yet, so many simply refused to come to him for eternal life.

With that as the prelude to our story in John 6, we see how important this little lad is in the story. He has very little. Certainly not enough to make any apparent difference. But he offers what he has to Jesus. He does not run from him. He comes to Christ and says, "All I have is yours. It's not much. But you may have it. Use it as you see fit."

So Jesus received the gifts of the boy who came to him. I love how our stained glass image shows Jesus gazing kindly, directly at the boy and blessing him. Don't you know he was pleased by that offering? Jesus took what the boy gave and then gave thanks to his Father for such a wholehearted gift. His thanking of his Father was Jesus' faith that the power of God would multiply what was given to meet the needs of the moment. By the way, if you ever wonder why the Lord's Supper is sometimes called the Eucharist, here you go. The Greek word for giving thanks is *eucharisteo*. It is in the faithful thanksgiving that ordinary bread and wine become, by the Spirit's power, a real communion in Christ's body and blood. By the Eucharist, the Thanksgiving, of Christ, in the Spirit's power, the loaves and fish were multiplied. In our thankful, faithful offering, God multiplies what we give him to be used for eternal significance.

Let's look at one more aspect of this story. Not only did the five loaves and two fish feed everyone, a crowd of 5000 men so perhaps 20,000 people, but there were leftovers! The other gospel accounts tell us that the leftovers were gathered. But only this account from John gives us Jesus' words. He said, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." Gather up what is left, so that nothing gets wasted. Why did John write this down? It seems to scream out with significance. Jesus doesn't want any of this miraculous food to be lost, to get left and spoiled and wasted. Does this have any meaning to us?

This is actually the same word used in John 3: 16: that whoever believes in him might not *perish* but have everlasting life. God gave his only begotten Son so that *we* might not be lost. So that our lives wouldn't spoil in waste. So that we wouldn't be leftover garbage. Rather, we are to be gathered in faith so that we can be useful in nourishing the world.

These words of Jesus are the words of a shepherd: "I want all my sheep to be gathered. I don't want to lose any. I don't want any life to be wasted. I want the work of God to make every life fruitful. If I didn't care, I'd just let the leftover fish and bread rot until the birds ate it. But I am a shepherd who feeds his flock from his own hand. I'm not into waste. I'm into reclamation. I make what is old new. I make what is empty full. I make what is discarded into a jewel. I make what is nothing into something. Gather up what is left, so that nothing perishes." What a lovely window on the heart of Jesus this is!

Do you think giving his five little loaves and two fish changed the life of that little boy? Do you think he was glad he gave away his family's dinner? Do you think as he grew that he became a disciple of Jesus? Do you think that after the resurrection, he joined the company of those who told the world, "Jesus is Savior! Jesus is Lord!" I know he did. I know that he expected to see miracles the rest of his life and that he did.

By contrast, what about the people in the crowd who hid the food they had when the disciples came asking for it? Those who thought, "Not me. Not this time. I need to protect myself. I need to look out for my own. What I have won't be enough anyway. It won't do any good so I'm not going to give it to Jesus." Do you think maybe they were sorry that their offerings weren't included in the miracle? That's an interesting principle to note. Jesus accomplished his miracle without any other gifts. He doesn't need us. But he gifts us with participating. Anybody who held out in self-protection missed seeing his face smile upon them. They missed

the hand raised in blessing. Jesus still did what he needed to do. But they missed out on participating. They missed the blessing and the joy of seeing God multiply what we offer beyond anything we could imagine.

That puts us right at the heart of how we will respond to this story. Do we, each day, offer ourselves to Christ to be used however he sees fit? “Lord Jesus, here I am. I give you my life anew this morning. Deploy me in your service. But Jesus, you know I have very little to offer. Not even five loaves or two fish. Yet what I have, in all my weakness and failure, I offer to you. Do something with me for your glory.”

It is the daily choice. It is very easy to join the religious people who nevertheless refused to come to Jesus for life. We can so easily become afraid of what he will ask us to do. We can so easily fall back into self-protection. We can so easily decide life will be better if we do it on our own. But that is not the path to life. Only failure and death lie down that glittering road.

Come to me, he says. Here I am. My arms are outstretched. I will receive you if you come to me. Offer me what you have, risk it on me, and I will let you participate in my saving, redeeming work in the world. The evil one will scream in our minds that this Jesus cannot be trusted. He does not really care. He wants to crush us and suffocate us and use us up. Don't you believe it! Just a few verses later, Jesus will declare, “It is I. Do not be afraid.” I am. I am the God who loves you. I am the God who came to you in skin and bone and then gave his life to you. I am the God with outstretched arms. Give me what you have. Give all that you know of yourself to all that you know of me and then watch what I do!