

## THANKSGIVING LEFTOVERS

Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch  
November 26, 2023

TEXT: John 6:1-15, Ephesians 3:20, John 1:16, Romans 15:13

Happy Thanksgiving Weekend! I hope you all had a wonderful Thanksgiving celebration last Thursday – with great visits with family and friends – and of course, lots of good food. Anybody have any leftovers from your meal on Thursday? That’s one of the best things about the weekend after Thanksgiving are all those great leftovers!

This year, Greg, as he has done for many years, decided to smoke our turkey. He wanted to make sure it was done in time for our midday meal last Thursday. So, he got up in the middle of the night to put it in the smoker. Well, when it got around noon, the turkey was still not done. Greg paced the floor and was a bit frustrated that his smoker just wasn’t working right. So, since our kids had to leave around 2 or so - by 1pm, we just decided to sit down and enjoy our meal of wonderful Thanksgiving side dishes... without the turkey! By the time everyone had left, Greg brought out a beautifully smoked 20-pound turkey! So now Greg and I have more than enough turkey leftovers!

Well, our story for today is about a great meal that began without hardly any food and ended up with lots of leftovers – all because of the miraculous touch of the Savior! And we will find that God continues, out of His abundance and bounty, to give us more than enough for all our needs – more than enough grace and power and hope and love.

I invite you to get your Bibles out and we will look closer at our text for today from the Gospel of John, in the New Testament. We will be reading John 6:1-15.

This story of the feeding of 5000 is a very familiar story to many of us. Some scholars believe that it's the greatest miracle Jesus ever performed. Interestingly, this story is the only miracle that is found in every gospel. It seems that this is a story that is so important, that God wanted to make sure we really heard it - again and again.

We’ve heard, in Greg’s children’s message, how there was a great crowd that followed Jesus wherever he went because of the miraculous signs of healing the sick. One day, there were 5,000 men in the crowd – which didn’t include the women and children. Some scholars estimate it could have been as many as 10-12,000 people.

In reading the other gospel accounts, we hear that Jesus had compassion on the crowds and so He sat down and taught them all day long. When it got late into the day, people were tired and hungry so the disciples tell Jesus to send the people away so that they can go eat... but picking up at verse 5, Jesus asks Philip,

*“where can we buy bread to feed all these people?” He was testing Philip, for He already knew what He was going to do. Philip replied, “Even if we worked for months, we wouldn't have enough money to feed them!”*

Have you ever felt like Philip? Overwhelmed- feeling like there is just not enough? I really struggle at times with that feeling of not enough. Sometimes I look at my schedule and I say, “God - there's just not enough time. I can't get it all done!” Have you ever felt like that? You look at your “To Do List” and it is just too long! Or maybe you have a lot of demands or burdens from family or your job –and you feel pulled this way and that, and you think: “God there is just not enough for me to go around!” Or maybe, you look at your checkbook or your pile of bills and you think, there is just not enough money. You see the needs around you- you hear the call to help or to give. “Lord, there is just no way. Send them away.” The situation seems so impossible. There is just not enough!

Or maybe you relate to Andrew look at verse 8:

*Then Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up. “There's a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that in this huge crowd?”*

Andrew says - I have a little but it doesn't amount to “. Ever felt that way? I have a little bit of money - a little bit of talent - a little bit of time; but boy, do they seem so inadequate. Especially when the need is so great! It seems like my contribution would be like a tiny little drop in the bucket compared to the deep need around me.

Do you know what Philip and Andrew had forgotten? They forgot who Jesus was – the “More than Enough God”. Hadn't they seen Jesus turn water into wine? He performed dozens of miracles- from healing a man who was unable to walk for 38 years to raising up a little girl who had died. Standing before them was the “more than enough” Son of God, who could do incredible, powerful things in the face of impossible situations. As the disciples were calculating what it would take to take care of the needs around them and thinking about how they had so little to meet those needs, somehow, they had forgotten to put Jesus into the equation. All they could see was scarcity when standing right before them was the abundance of God!

Oh, how often we can be just like those disciples! All we can see is not enough – not enough money or ability – not enough strength or power – not enough hope and maybe even, not enough love. We don't have enough. But what are we doing? We are leaving Jesus out of the equation. We forget that when we put our situation and our need into the hands of Jesus, He can bless it and multiply it and give us even more beyond what we need.

Look what happens with that boy's lunch of 5 fish and 2 loaves of bread. Jesus gave thanks to God and then had it distributed to the people – and in verse 11, we hear that “they all ate as much as they wanted.” In fact, everyone was full! Then, look at verse 12, “*Jesus told His disciples, “Now gather the leftovers, so that nothing is wasted. So they picked up the pieces and filled twelve baskets of leftovers!”* Now that's a lot of leftovers!!

And what happened to all those 12 baskets of leftovers? Were they just like a “doggie bag” for each of the disciples to take home and later heat up in the microwave? Or did they use them to feed the next hungry crowd they came upon? Some people imagine that they may have put the 12 baskets in the boat they got in, right after the miraculous feeding of the 5,000. We don't know for sure – but perhaps Jesus wanted to leave the disciples with a visual reminder of

what God could do in their lives – to feed the hungry – and provide for their needs – giving not just the bare minimum but with ample provisions and blessings.

God is a God of leftovers. He is a God of abundance and generosity. He gives more than enough!

So, on this Thanksgiving Weekend, let's give thanks to God that He is a "More than Enough" God of Leftovers.

We are grateful for Leftover Creation. Think about the incredible world that God created. It wasn't created with just the basics. He could have made a world that had only one or two colors or no color at all. He could have given us just what we needed for food to survive – just one protein, a carb, 1 veggie and fruit and some water to drink... and we'd never know the difference. But instead think of the variety of tastes and colors, textures and flavors we have and all of the choices we have of meats and veggies and fruit. God created things that way because He is a God of abundance and generosity. He provides us not *just* enough but *more* than enough.

Psalm 104:24, in the Message version says: *"What a wildly wonderful world, GOD! You made it all, with Wisdom at your side, made earth overflow with your wonderful creations."*

Thank God for Leftover – overflowing - Creation!

And we thank God for Leftover Grace!

John 1:16 tells us that *"From His abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another"* – or some versions say, *"out of His fulness we have received grace upon grace"*. God lavishes His grace upon us. Grace is God's unmerited or unearned favor. Grace is God giving us love, mercy, forgiveness and eternal life – when what we deserve is His condemnation and eternal punishment. As Pastor Ross Knight puts it: *"God is not selfish with His grace, He is lavish with it. God doesn't dispense His grace with an eyedropper, He sloshes it around with a bucket. You have not been 'barely' saved by God's grace – but you are well and truly saved, saturated and covered by God's grace."*<sup>1</sup> And here's what's amazing: We can't "out-sin" God's grace ... because God's grace is always more – always abundant – more than enough!

Thank God for Leftover Grace!

And then thank God for Leftover Power! In Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, he prays that they will come to know the height and depth, width and length - the abundance of God's love. And then he gives a benediction with some pretty big superlatives, saying: *"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly, abundantly more than we can ask or think according to the power at work within us."*

God has graciously given us the power to know the love of Christ. And we, as believers, have been given an internal power source to be able to live as His disciples. And it is not a thimble's worth of power – but rather it is a stick of dynamite worth of power. Scripture tells us

that the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead is the same power you and I have been given! And that power is the Holy Spirit! And He is able – more than able - to do exceedingly far more than we could ever ask or imagine! There is an overflow to God's power – and His power is made perfect in our weakness. Right when we begin to feel weak or inadequate or insignificant – we need to remember and thank God for Leftover Power.

And we thank God for Leftover Hope.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, Paul wants them to know of the power of the Spirit as well. He prays: *"May the God of hope, fill you with all joy and peace, as you trust in Him, so that you may OVERFLOW with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."* (Romans 15:13) When we put our trust in God – and love Him with all our hearts – God can fill us with His joy and peace. And then God won't give us just a small amount of hope that we can cling to, hanging on by a thread. No – God gives an abundance of hope – leftovers, if you will! We won't just get by, but we will OVERFLOW, with an abundance of God's hope. We'll have hope to make it through our difficult situations – hope for peace – and hope that one day we will live forever with Him in heaven.

As we come to a close, I want to take us back for one more moment to the 12 baskets of leftovers that the disciples picked up after the feeding of the 5000. So many different ideas about where those 12 baskets went. One pastor I heard this week had a wonderful guess of how Jesus used those 12 leftover baskets.<sup>2</sup> He pointed out that the gospels say that immediately, the disciples got in the boat to cross over to the other side, which means they probably put the baskets with them in the boat. Jesus did not go with them but went up the hill to pray.

And then the disciples got into a terrible storm. And the disciples were terrified. And then they saw, what they thought was a ghost, walking towards them on the water. It turned out to be Jesus! Peter then tried to walk on the water to Jesus – but sank when he took his eyes off of Jesus and onto the waves and the wind. Jesus catches him and pulls him into the boat, saying: "Oh you of little faith! Why did you doubt?" And just think – Jesus could have continued by saying: "Don't you remember the miracle of the feeding of the 5000? If I brought you through that, I can bring you through this. Just look at those baskets of leftovers and remember what I did for you ... and the people. I gave you more than enough in your need – I gave you leftovers!"

In much the same way, Jesus met with his disciples in the upper room, years later. He took up a piece of bread saying this bread is my body – broken for you. Take and eat of it ALL of you. Then he took some leftover fruit of the vine and said this is my blood, shed for ALL of you. Every time you sit down to take this bread and this cup, remind yourself that: "if I can overcome the sin, the cross and the grave and rise again to new life – there is nothing that will come your way that I cannot handle."

That is the good news we celebrate this Thanksgiving and every week as we gather at the table of the Lord! God gives Himself and He is always more than enough! Thanks be to God!

**PRAYER/INVITATION**

## RESOURCES

<sup>1</sup>Ross Knight, “Thanksgiving Leftovers”,  
<https://sermons.logos.com/sermons/220168-thanksgiving-leftovers>

<sup>2</sup>The Gratitude Challenge | Thanksgiving Leftovers | Turning Point Worship Center  
[https://www.youtube.com/live/J\\_ZXgYvOHdQ?feature=shared](https://www.youtube.com/live/J_ZXgYvOHdQ?feature=shared)