

## **“Signs” / #4: Feeding 5000 / July 19, 2015**

Have you ever been asked to do something you knew you couldn't do? It's just too much, too hard. It's a pretty common theme in film, TV, literature, legend. Sometimes people are asked to do the impossible.

- There's a legend about a king who demands that a peasant bring him some yogurt. That's not so bad. Except the king wanted yogurt made with milk from a bull. Ever tried milking a bull?
- One of the great movies of all time: Monte Python and the Holy Grail. King Arthur is on a quest for the holy grail, and he runs into the knights who say, “Ni!” They make two demands. First, they require a “shrubbery,” (not so hard) and then they order Arthur to cut down the mightiest tree in the forest ... with a herring!” Which is ... kind of hard.
- Then there is Southpark. Are any of you guys Southpark fans? Well Kyle wants to go to a concert. But in order to go, he has to clean the garage, shovel the snow from the driveway, and bring democracy to Cuba. Which apparently he does.

Sometimes what we are asked to do is not impossible in itself, it's just too much.

- Hercules is ordered to clean the Aegean stables, which is not impossible, but he was told to do it in one day. The stables were used by 1000 animals, which produced enormous quantities of dung, and they hadn't been cleaned in 30 years. Impossible ... they thought.
- Or Cinderella. Her chores weren't impossible, it was just impossible to do so many so fast: “Cinderella: There's the large carpet in the main hall: Clean it! And the windows upstairs and down: Wash them! Oh yes, and the tapestries and the draperies. And don't forget the garden. Then scrub the terrace, sweep the halls and the stairs, clean the chimneys. And of course there's the mending and the sewing and the laundry... Oh, yes, and one more thing. See that Lucifer gets his bath.” A bit much, before the ball.

One of my favorites is about the annual scavenger hunt at the University of Chicago. They always assign one or two things to do that are supposed to be impossible. One of the assignments in 1999 was to build a nuclear reactor in a shed on the quad – in 4 days. And two physics students did it. Kind of scared the organizers a wee bit.

You can even find this this theme in the Bible, quite a lot.

- In the Old Testament David wants to marry the daughter of King Saul. King Saul doesn't like David much. So he tells David he can marry his daughter if he brings him the foreskins of 100 Philistines. Which is supposed to make 100 Philistines a wee bit mad. Saul didn't think David could do it. So David brings him ... 200.
- And then, in the story we are going to unpack today, Jesus tells his disciples to do something even harder. This one is not possible – they think.

So, have you ever been asked to do something you knew you couldn't do? More specifically, have you ever been asked by God to do something you knew you couldn't do? Now, if you have been a Jesus follower for a while, the answer is – “Well yeah!” Because sometimes God asks us to be like Jesus when being like Jesus is really, really hard! He tells us to behave differently, to think differently, to have a different kind of character.

- He tells us to love the unlovable. That's really, really hard!
- He tells us to forgive the unforgivable. That's the toughest, for some of you.
- He tells us to forgive ourselves, to accept his grace. That's one of the toughest for me.
- He tells us to resist temptation, to repent our sins, to give up our prejudices, to give thanks when times are hard, to give our first part back to God even when money is tight, to die to self.

And sometimes he tells us to do something, to serve him in some way that seems impossible. Have you ever been asked by God to do something you know you really can't do, on your own. It's going to take his help. To give some money you don't have, to oversee some

ministry that's way beyond you, to share your faith when it's way outside your comfort zone? You see, sometimes God nudges us to do something that we are not smart enough, or gifted enough, or prepared enough to do. Have you ever felt a nudge by God to do something, and you are thinking – "God I'm not your guy!" He did that a whole lot in the Bible. And maybe ... maybe what God is trying to do is to stretch your faith, to teach you to trust him, to get you to just do what you can do, trusting that God will do what only he can do ... through you.

Because we believe something about God. This is huge. This will make all the difference when he asks you to do something that's just too big, too hard. Here's a verse you need to remember.

Jesus said, "With God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26). Do you buy that? "With God all things are possible." With God, what is possible? \_\_\_\_ Anything he wants you to do, anything he nudges you to do. You see, too often we allow our so called "reason" to trump faith, and before we know it we are boxed in by human limitations rather than trusting in the God of the impossible.

Okay, if you have a Bible with you, or a Bible app on your phone or tablet, find the Gospel of John, chapter 6. John is the fourth book of the New Testament, the fourth of the biographies of Jesus, and we're going to study the first part of chapter 6 in just a minute. If you are new with us today, you've joined us in the middle of a study of miracles found in the gospel of John. John calls Jesus' miracles "signs." Because John wants us to know that miracles aren't just supposed to wow us; they are suppose to teach us, to point us to some truth about Jesus and to give us a picture of what His Kingdom will be like. And if you guys have read Andy Stanley's Deep and Wide, you'll know that some of what I say today is drawn from him.

Okay, John 6.1. Today we are looking at Sign #4, the feeding of the 5000. This is the only miracle other than the resurrection that is reported in all 4 gospels. It starts like this: "After this, Jesus crossed over to the far side of the Sea of Galilee, also known as the Sea of

Tiberias.” Now in John’s story of Jesus, this takes place right after Jesus heals a paraplegic down in Jerusalem. We talked about that last week. But the others gospels tell us a little more. Apparently Jesus’ cousin, John the Baptist, has just been executed by a guy named Herod Antipas, because John was using Herod as a sermon illustration for sin – really dangerous back then. So it looks like Jesus wanted to get away from the crowds for a bit – perhaps to do some grieving, and some praying. But the crowds weren’t about to let him have some quiet time.

John says, verse 2: “A huge crowd kept following him wherever he went, because they saw his miraculous signs as he healed the sick.” And I understand that. Jesus needed some quiet time (we all do sometimes), but the crowds are more interested in getting whatever they could from Jesus. And instead of getting grumpy, like I would, Jesus gets ... more Jesus.

John says, verse 3: “Then Jesus climbed a hill and sat down with his disciples around him.” And apparently he does some more teaching, and probably some more healing until they’ve got a real problem. Verses 5 & 6: “Jesus soon saw a huge crowd of people coming to look for him. Turning to Philip, he asked, ‘Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?’ He was testing Philip, for he already knew what he was going to do.”

Now, so far every one of the signs of Jesus that we have studied has been preceded by something Jesus says that is flat-out weird. And here’s one of the things you do when you read the stories of Jesus. When Jesus says something that sounds weird, you slow down and dig a little. It probably means that something big is going on, but you have to slow down to catch it.

- Sign 1: Jesus is at a wedding. His mother says, “They are out of wine.” And Jesus says, “Woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My hour has not yet come.” (John 2.4) Well that’s kind of weird. But when he changes some water into wine, it’s a preview of his turning some wine into blood – on a cross, for our sins.

- Sign 2: Jesus tells a father whose son is dying, “Unless you people see signs and wonders,” Jesus told him, “You will never believe.” (Jn 4.48) Which sounds kind of rude. But often, in fact maybe usually, what we want from Jesus is a miracle, not a Lord.
- Sign 3: Jesus asks a man who has been lame for 38 years, “Do you want to get well?” (John 5.6) Which sounds flat-out weird! But the truth is, most of us don’t really want Jesus to fix what’s broken in us. At least not now.
- And here, in John 6, Jesus says to Philip: “You feed them.”

Now, “You feed them” doesn’t sound all that weird, until you picture the scene in your mind. We’re going to find out that there were 5000 men present. That doesn’t count the women and the children. I don’t know: 15-20,000 people? The caption for that picture told me there were about 5000 at that event. So about 3 or 4 times as many people. That event had dozens of food trucks. Philip had 0. Our best guess is that there were maybe 40,000 people in all of Galilee. About a third of them are here, chasing Jesus. An incredible crowd! And no Kroger nearby, no Walmart, no Chick-Fil-A. Are you excited? I understand we’re supposed to be getting a Chick-Fil-A over near K-Mart! So you’ve got a Woodstock crowd, in the middle of nowhere, and Jesus says, “Philip, you feed them.” Does that classify as weird to you?

Well, Philip does the math. “Jesus, even if we had a Kroger superstore nearby, it would take 200 denarii to feed them.” That was their money back then: denarii. If you worked all day, you’d expect to be paid 1 denarius. “It would take 200 days wages to feed these people.” Let’s say \$15 an hour, 8 hours a day, 200 days ... Philip says, “Jesus, even if there was a Walmart next door, it would take nearly \$25000 to feed these people. How am I going to do it?!”

But Jesus is just testing him. Because he already knows what he is going to do. You see, this wasn’t just about feeding a crowd. This was about stretching some faith. Jesus has selected 12 men. They don’t know it yet, but in just a couple years the future of God’s work on earth is going to rest on their shoulders. Big, big stuff lies just out

ahead of them. And Jesus has to prepare them as best he can in the limited time he has with them.

So what one piece does Jesus prioritize? What is the most important thing Jesus needs to build in you to prepare you to serve him? Is it teaching them more about God? No. Sometimes that's what we focus on. Sometimes we think that's what discipleship is all about. It's about studying the Bible, learn more about God, knowledge.

But Jesus went straight for their faith! He has to teach them to trust God. Because God is going to ask them to go where they don't want to go, and to do what they don't think they can do. They are going to have to trust that with God, all things are possible. So Jesus keeps putting them in uncomfortable places: he sends them out in boats when storms are coming in; he sends them out to face-down demons, He takes them through Samaria, where they have to rub shoulders with people they grew up hating; he took them to parties thrown by tax collectors and sinners. Jesus is constantly taking them out of their comfort zone and challenging them to do things they can't do ... on their own.

And that's still what God is doing, with you. And that's still what our job is as a church. You see, growing into a Christ-Driven 24/7 Jesus follower isn't just about knowing more about God, it's about learning to trust him when following him is flat-out hard. You see, we haven't done you any favors if you are always comfortable when you leave here. We haven't done you any favors if your faith is not being stretched here. And so we challenge you to be like Jesus.

- We challenge you to love the unlovable.
- We challenge you to forgive the unforgivable; and to forgive yourself, to accept his grace.
- We challenge you to resist temptation, to repent of our sins, to give up your prejudices, to give thanks when times are hard, to give your first part back to God even when money is tight, to die to self.

- We challenge you to serve him in places you don't want to go, and to do things that you think are way beyond your comfort zone or your skill set.

And sometimes you push back. You feel that nudge from God, and here's what we tell him: "Jesus, there is no way! I can't! Even if there was a Walmart next door, it would take 25 grand to feed these people, and we just don't have it!" And we make our excuses. But we don't think they are excuses. We think they are legitimate reasons for ... disobeying God.

- Jesus, that's just too hard!
- Jesus, I'm not smart enough. I wouldn't know how to do it; I wouldn't know what to do.
- Jesus, I don't have the gifts or the resources to do what you want me to do.
- Jesus, I want these people helped, but I'm just a prayer warrior. I'll keep praying that you send someone else to get it done, because I'm not your guy.

Ever been there, felt that? You get this nudge from God. Listen, he's trying to stretch your faith, he's trying to teach you to trust ... the God with whom all things are possible. He's trying to show you that you don't have to do it on your own; if he nudges you, he'll help you get it done.

So here's what happens next. John says, "Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up. "There's a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish." (John 6.8-9) I kind of picture it like this: Andrew kind of jumps in and says, "There's a kid over there who is willing to share his lunch." And I suspect Philip glares at him, and the other disciples shake their heads like Andrew is an idiot. So Andrew backs off a bit: "But what's a kid's meal from Captain D going to do for 15000 people?"

So Jesus says, "Five small barley loaves (think a cheap, thin roll), two small fish (think sardines): that will do." Jesus says, "Just bring me what you have ... I can work with that." "Just bring me what you have."

- “But I didn’t go to college.” “That’s okay; just bring me what you have.”
- “But I only have one free night a week.” “Perfect! I can work with that; just bring me what you have.”
- “But I don’t have much money.” “No problem; just bring me what you have.”
- “But I’m not very good at that.” “That’s okay; just bring me what you can do.”
- “But I’m afraid I’ll fail again.” “That’s all right: just bring me what you have.”

I think God says that a lot. “Bring me what you have and I’ll work with it.” His Kingdom is built on stories like that:

- Moses says, “But I don’t talk well.” God says, “That’s all right, I’ll get you the help you need.”
- A poor widow is out of food, a crumbs of flour and drops of oil. She offers it to Elijah the prophet. It’s enough. From that moment on there is always flour in her flour jar and oil in her oil jug.
- Gideon says, “We don’t enough men to fight this war.” God says, “Just bring me what you have. Your 300 is more than enough defeat their 130,000 – with my help.”
- Samson kills a 1000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey.
- A boy about the size of my grandson Steven defeats a warrior almost twice the size of Deon with slingshot ... and a little help from God.

It’s one of those things you keep bumping into in the Bible: God doesn’t need the finest or the best; He doesn’t need anything; He allows us to join Him, bringing whatever we have; while He does the rest. They did what they knew how to do trusting God would do what only God can do! There it is. There’s nothing else. That is faith.

So Jesus says (verse 10), “‘Tell everyone to sit down.’ So they all sat down on the grassy slopes. (The men alone numbered about 5,000.) Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God” ... I kind of think the disciples were kind of peeking during his prayer. You ever peek? They

were looking at the kid's meal from Captain D, and looking at the crowd, and kind of shaking their heads – Jesus is thanking God ... for this?! “And (then Jesus) distributed the bread to the people. Afterward he did the same with the fish. (John 6.10-11) By the way, if Jesus were to replicate this meal today, for us, he'd morph the fish into bacon!

All the other gospels tell us that Jesus distributed the food by giving the bread and the fish to his disciples and telling them – “Okay, now you feed them.” And they are kind of standing there, looking at about a sixth of a sardine, and a cheap flat dinner roll ... And they turn around and see about 15000 people sitting there, waiting for some food. And they take a deep breathe, and they start doing what they know how to do – they can start passing it out; and God starts doing what only he can do – somehow multiplying it over and over and over again.

Do you think God can do that? A lot of people are cynical. And they offer up all kinds of stupid alternatives.

- Maybe Jesus showed the crowd the lunch the boy had brought, and shamed everybody else into pulling out the food they had hidden in their pockets. And everybody started sharing with each other as they hummed Kumbaya.
- Maybe Jesus was sitting near the entrance of a cave. And he had a bunch of bread and fish stashed in there. And he was actually just making it look like a miracle
- Or maybe Jesus pulled off some kind of mass hypnosis, and made the whole crowd feel full.

Listen guys: if you believe in God, if you believe in a God who spoke the universe into existence with a few words, a God of that kind of incredible power – multiplying a few sardines and dinner rolls is pretty much child's play, don't you think?

So, the disciples did what they could do, and somehow trusted God to do what only he can do ... which is a whole lot. And God stretched their faith. And he still works that way with you, and me. Sometimes God asks you, sometimes God nudges you, sometimes God

commands you to do something way beyond your comfort level, or your abilities. Guys, if God tells you to do it, he'll help you get it done. You just do what you can do, and trust that God will do what only he can do.

- He tells us to love the unlovable. Well, you probably can't ... on your own. But with his help ...
- He tells us to forgive the unforgivable. That's really, really hard, for people like me. Nearly impossible ... without his help. But he's really good at it. He forgives you!
- He tells us to forgive ourselves, to accept his grace. You just do what you can do, and trust that God will begin to lift that burden of guilt and shame.
- He tells us to resist temptation. Guys, I can't ... on my own. But listen to his promise.
- The Bible says, "All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; he'll never let you be pushed past your limit; he'll always be there to help you come through it." (1 Corinthians 10.13) I can't resist temptation on my own; it's stronger than me. But it's not stronger than he is; and he's got my back, if I let him.
- He tells us to give up our prejudices ... We can do that, with his help.
- He tells us to give thanks when times are hard, to give our first part back to God even when money is tight, to die to self.

Guys, have you ever been through a time when your faith was stretched by God? Can you think of a time when you were nudged by God to serve him in some way you thought was beyond you ... and with his help, you got it done? You see, God uses those experiences to transform us.

- There are fantastic ministries in this church led by people who just knew "That's way beyond my skill set." But they felt God's nudge, and they did what they could do, and watched as God did what only he could do. It is so cool to be used by God!
- There are people in this church, people who have experienced Jesus because some of you stepped way out of your comfort

zone, and you reached out. You did what you could do, and trusted that God would do what only he could do. And he did.

Guys, we have an amazing God. The song says:

You stood before creation, Eternity in Your hand.

You spoke the earth into motion my soul now to stand.

You stood before my failure and carried the cross for my shame.

My sin weighed upon Your shoulders, my soul now to stand.

So what can I say and what can I do

But offer this heart O God Completely to You