

**“Beyond Expectations”**  
Matthew 14:13-21  
August 7, 2011  
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Last month, our Pie Auction fundraiser was personally a new cultural experience to me. When I heard about the ‘Red, Blue and BBQ party’, I was curious about this event, but I didn’t realize how wild it could be. It was great fun to watch a ‘live-heated auction’! At first, I was a little doubtful when I saw the displayed pies because there were only around 20 homemade pies. (Imagine if it cost 20 bucks for each one. It would be only be \$300-400 hundred dollars for 20 pies.) I was afraid that there were not many pies this year. But soon it turned out that there was little to worry about. The sanctuary was packed with people, and we raised over three thousand dollars from a small amount of homemade pies. Thank you again to all of you who were involved and did such wonderful work for this fun and great tradition of this church.

What I was deeply impressed with was not just the successful fundraiser, but I was more touched by people’s laughter, joyful energy and willingness to go crazy for higher betting, even for a hundred dollar ‘blackberry pie.’ I experienced ‘extravagant Generosity’ in this faith community. The definition of ‘Miracle’ in the Bible means ‘God’s visible sign.’ Our ‘Pie Auction’ was a small version of a miraculous event like the story of the “Five loaves and two fish’ in our Scripture reading.

Today’s Scripture reading has a connection to our recent ‘Pie auction event.’ It is a well-known, popular story in the Gospel. As you watched in the children’s time, the story is simple. Jesus fed five thousand people when they had nothing but a few loaves and a couple of cold fish. According to the reading, “Not only all ate and were filled, but there were left over of the broken pieces, 12 baskets full.” The thing is that there wasn’t just enough. There was more than enough. What can we learn from this story?

Here is some interesting information for you regarding the background of this story. First, the story of feeding the five thousand people is recorded in all four gospels. This means that this story is a significantly important story not to be forgotten but to be read and to be shared from generation to generation among the disciples and inside the early Christian community. Secondly, the Scripture says, “the crowd was very large. Counting adult males only, there are five thousand present.” So the total could have been around 15,000 if we include women and children. The last thing is that there were twelve baskets left over even after all of the people ate and were filled. According to the Bible, it says: “the crowd was fully satisfied with food in abundance.” Why was this

story so important to the disciples and the early Christian community? We hope to understand Jesus' teaching to us because this must be important to our Fair Oaks community, too.

When I was a Sunday school student in the church, I was a curious boy with many questions about the Bible and about the world around me. One day, I asked my Sunday school teacher whether Eve had 'belly button' or not if she was made out of Adam's bones in the creation story. I also asked my teacher how Jesus could feed over five thousand people with just five loaves and two fish? Now, I thank teachers for their great patience and caring heart to listen to me even though I was so naughty and silly. The Bible doesn't tell us what Jesus did for this miraculous work, but there was an important clue that we need to remember about Jesus ministry: in verse 14, "Jesus had compassion and cured their sick." The core of Jesus' ministry was 'God's compassion' for people, whoever they were. Jesus wasn't irritated or angry at the large crowd, but he cared for them. God's love and grace is always open and available to everyone as long as we are willing to accept it.

There was a religious conference after World War 2. All religious scholars all over the world gathered together, and they talked about contributions of world religions to our world. One of the questions that was raised about Christianity was: what is unique about Christianity when comparing it with other religions? What is its unique contribution to the world? C.S Lewis came forward and said to people: "That is easy - it is Grace." Grace is the core of the Christian faith. Grace means "God's unconditional and free gift even though we do not deserve it." God sent His son and had him take over our sin and died on the cross on our behalf. Why? God confirmed His compassion through the death of the Son of God. Grace is a sign of God's extravagant generosity and radical hospitality to sinners. No other religion talks about almighty God's sacrificial act and compassionate heart for human beings.

Let's picture again what is happening in this story. When Jesus moved to a more remote area in the wilderness, the crowds followed along the shoreline, keeping an eye on his boat. When Jesus' boat landed, many of the crowd had already arrived. What does this mean? More than ten thousand people were following Jesus because of their spiritual thirst. In both old times and even in our time, we are hungry for God's presence. Augustine confessed: "I have a hole in my soul. Even though I tried to fill it with everything around me, I realize that it is in vain. Since this infinite hole can be filled only with an infinite object; in other words by God." We are eager for God and God's presence in our souls.

As the hour was late, the disciples wanted to send the crowd away so that they could get something to eat, but Jesus said to the disciples: "They need to not go away; you give them something to eat." Now there are over 5,000 people on a field. What they had, 'Five loaves and two fish,' was ridiculous! We don't

know exactly what Jesus did for the people, but the conclusion was beautifully done: “All people ate and were filled, even twelve baskets were full.” What we know from this story is that all people were filled with fullness and satisfaction even overflowing in abundance in both spiritual and physical manner.

This is the point of this story. In life, we definitely experience challenges of financial problems, broken relationships, troubled hearts and loneliness. We hardly experience ‘enough’ and ‘abundance’ in our lives. According to research, forty percent of the Americans people spend 110 percent of their annual income each year. Happiness based on possession causes people to pursue a never-ending goal, leaving them dissatisfied, wanting more, never able to satisfy their desires.

In the history of the church, there is another intriguing twist to this story. Jesus and his disciples got into a boat and sailed back again across Lake Galilee, this time landing up on another place. As they arrived in the boat, the disciples began discussing quietly among themselves, out of earshot of Jesus: “Who brought the bread? Did anyone bring any bread for lunch? And Jesus, knowing their thoughts, asked them: “Didn’t you get it? Don’t you understand? Are you so hard headed? Are you so hard hearted? You just saw the feeding of the five thousand and twelve baskets of bread which were left over. Don’t you get it about who I am? Don’t you get it about the abundant generosity of God? Don’t you get it that God will take care of you in your needs? Don’t you get it, even after you have personally seen these miracles?”

In our Scripture reading, the crowd was on a ‘deserted place.’ This is a metaphor for our reality, needs, and emptiness. The disciples do not have the resources, in their own wisdom, wealth and strength to meet the need and stand up to the challenge. The miracle happened when they offered what they had and put their trust in God. The disciples believed that they didn’t have ‘enough’ to feed over ten thousand people, but Jesus encouraged the disciples not to stay focused on ‘bitter reality’ but to see the ‘possibility’ of what God can do for them.

What about us? Even though we say that we believe in God, we always try to take care of everything within our own ability. God always exceeds our expectations. God will do more what we can imagine if we have in faith.

In our daily lives, we can’t stop worrying about many things. Let us be honest to God that our burden is so heavy and is certainly hard. Do not rely on yourself, but put your trust in God and see what God will do for us. I have heard that we have a financial challenge in this year’s budget. I thank our church council and congregation for your faithful work to this church. God will bless us more than abundantly if we can see and do our ministry in faith.

Let’s remember that God fed more than five thousand people’s needs using their limited resources. May God also bless our needs through the same miraculous work in our lives. God will always do more beyond our expectations

in faith. I hope that this ought to be our faith statement. We come here with empty pockets humbly in faith, but God will fill in our emptiness in abundance. Amen.