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Summer of Love: *Enough for Everyone*
 Matthew 14:13-21

I took my car to get an oil change on Friday and I had a strange, utterly 21st century experience. I was flipping through news stories on my phone, enjoying the free wifi at the service center, when I flipped from a story about Justin Bieber's engagement to yet another story about the UN report on poverty in the US highlighting the prevalence of hookworm in Lowndes County, Alabama, not two hours south of here. What a jarring juxtaposition. This juxtaposition is a thing that happens, right? I guess I ask for it by reading news on my phone, but it's enough to give a person whiplash. My brain has to shift from a headline about one of the Kardashians to an article about the 700 children still in US custody who will not be reunited with their families. The striking contrast between frivolous wealth and profound need is glaringly obvious, thanks to modern media.

When I think about it, though, this isn't a new phenomenon.

Our story this morning is the feeding of the 5000. And in the text is one of those jarring juxtapositions. See, the miracle is preceded by another story, one where the opulence and brutality of Imperial Rome are on full display. It's the story of the beheading of John the Baptist. In case you don't remember – Herod has a birthday party and promises his daughter whatever she wants because she danced so well for him. She requests the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Her father complies. As if shining a spotlight on all that is wrong with the pleasures of the empire, Matthew follows the gruesome tale of John's demise with this one, which demonstrates the healing promise and generous abundance of the kingdom of God. The world is ruled by death-dealing powers, Matthew tells us, but God's power is life-giving, and God's desire is that all are fed. We know this because the word became flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth...

(read Matthew 14:13-21)

What a story. I love this story, because it shows us what the kingdom of God is like: In the kingdom of God, there is enough for everyone!

This story shows us what God's love makes possible: God's love heals the sick and feeds the hungry.

This story shows us what God's power can do: God's power can use whatever we are able to offer to accomplish miraculous things.

It's this last point that I want to lift up today as a word of hope and encouragement. Because I don't know about you, but sometimes I don't feel up to the task at hand. Have you ever found yourself up against a task so enormous you feel like you need a team to

get the job done but you're all by yourself? Or you're on a journey and you need a map and a survival guide but all you have is a half-empty water bottle and a cliff bar? Maybe you've shown up to a party, and it's not until after you walk into the living room that you realize it's a potluck – and all you have to offer is a pack of gum.

Those examples are abstract, but we don't have to look hard or far to find challenges that might seem insurmountable. Look back on the past week and I'll bet we all can think of a few.

I have to think that's how the disciples must have felt when Jesus turns to them and says – you give them something to eat.

More than 5000 people have followed Jesus to hear him teach – probably three times that, if you count women and children, which I obviously do. 15,000 hot, tired, and hungry people, out in the middle of nowhere – out in the wilderness. Ready for a good meal at the end of the day, looking to the one they followed out there in the first place with a look that I'm guessing some of you know pretty well – it's the “so... what's for dinner?” look. It's most often worn by people not in charge of meal planning, the ones on the campout who only thought to bring marshmallows because s'mores are the most important thing, right?

So, what are we going to eat?

The disciples don't have to look in their packs to know they can't feed these people – there's no way they could've planned a banquet; they didn't even know the crowd was going to be there! They thought Jesus was trying to have a quiet getaway to grieve and rest after the tragic spectacle of John's death. But all of these people just showed up! The disciples can't afford to feed them, not on an itinerant preacher's salary. Send them away – let them find their own food, they say. We can't help them, we don't even have enough for ourselves.

This doubt, this overwhelming doubt the disciples must feel is familiar, isn't it? It's too much, he's asking too much, there are too many people, it's too hard, we just can't, we aren't built for it, we're not prepared. We don't have time, we don't have the resources.

Liz is a lawyer who used to lead middle schoolers on two week backpacking trips out of Jackson Hole through the Grand Tetons in Wyoming. She tells a story about a camper named Seth.¹ She says every trip had a Seth – someone who whined and complained about everything. Seth's parents made him go on this trip – so he didn't want to be there. Seth was the kid who tried to sneak a Game Boy in his backpack, forgetting that there are no outlets in the wilderness. Liz remembers that the first day of their trek, Seth was the very. last. hiker, walking as slow as humanly possible, and crying every step of the way,

¹ Allen, Liz, “Cub to King,” *The Moth story slam*, recorded May 1, 2014 in Seattle, Washington. <https://themoth.org/stories/cub-to-king>

because it was hard, and he was in pain, and he didn't know he was doing – he cried the entire 8-hour day, all the way up the mountain.

Seth hated the trip. He didn't know what he was doing, because he hadn't paid attention during orientation because he didn't want to be there in the first place. Somehow, Seth had snuck a stuffed animal into his pack, a little lion named Simba. At one point on the first day, he sat down and took Simba out of his pack and said, "Simba doesn't want to hike anymore..."

Simba ended up speaking for Seth for the first five days of the trek. All of the campers had tasks they had to do, to help with the cooking, to pitch their tents, to clean up camp, to wash dishes, things like that. Seth wouldn't do any of it. Simba doesn't want to do dishes, he would say. Simba can't put up the tent.

As you can imagine, after several days of this, the other campers were starting to get really annoyed. Part of the program was learning about different leadership styles, dictator, delegation, collaboration, or consensus. On the second week of their trip, each student got a chance to be the leader for the day, and decide how all of the tasks would be done. When it was Seth's turn, he decided that the only leadership style he would use would be delegation. So he delegated everything! Other students had to set up breakfast, he delegated dish duty, delegated clean up, all of it.

By the end of the day, people had had it. The other campers sat Seth down by the fire, and they told him, "you know Seth, you and Simba never do anything. You really are making us angry. You've got to do your part." And Seth started to cry and the counselor, Liz, though, well, this is it, the come to Jesus moment. maybe we're really getting through to him.

Next morning, Liz woke up really early because there was some racket in the camp, and it sounded like someone was yelling. She poked her head out of the tent and saw that the bear bags had been taken down and there was food everywhere. She wondered what the heck was going on, so she got all the way out of the tent and saw that breakfast was already out and ready – She usually woke up before all of the kids to have coffee before the twelve year olds, but someone had even made her coffee! And then she heard the screaming again, and she saw that the kids were starting to stir and look out of their tents, too. There was a cliff overlooking the camp, and she looked up and saw Seth. He had woken up an hour early and made breakfast for everyone by himself. Then, he had climbed up to the cliff. The sun was just starting to shine over the top of the cliff – the campsite was still in the shadows – and he decided to wake everyone up by holding Simba up and singing – [Nants ingonyama bagithi baba.](#)²

² This is the first line of the song *Circle of Life* from the Lion King musical – it is Zulu that means, "Here is a lion, father," with the word for lion indicating not just any lion, but the king of the beasts. ([genius.com/10212598](https://www.genius.com/10212598))

This is why kids go on these trips. It's why people travel. To test our limits. To find out what we are capable of, to learn that we can do far more than we think. This is one of the gifts of the journey of discipleship, as well. To find ourselves in the wilderness, with nothing but Christ's teaching to sustain us, and to discover that God will do more through us, to heal the world, to feed the people, than we might think possible or even imagine.

We are capable of more than we might think, because the God of life is with us:

God who brought the Israelites out of slavery.

God who provided manna in the wilderness.

God, who fed 5000 people with 5 loaves and a few fish,

God who healed the sick, who freed the captives, God who conquered death!

God is with us, and God provides!

One more thing about this story. Christ doesn't just perform the miracle while the disciples watch. He works with them and through them, charging and challenging them to find food and distribute it – YOU give them something to eat. There are hungry people all around. People are hungry for food, they're hungry for meaning, they're hungry for work, for healing, for care, for justice, for an encounter with the mystery and wonder of God. Yes, it can be overwhelming. It may feel like we aren't cut out for this. But remember: God has no hands but our own. And if we offer what can, even if it feels inadequate, God will do great things through us.

If we trust in God, we will find that there is enough for everyone, if we but share it.

We have what is needed if we but offer it.

We can handle the challenge at hand if we but try, because the God of life can and will work through us.

Because God so loves the world, God will feed the people.

God will provide sustenance in the wilderness.

God will heal,

God will show up,

God will work through us to shatter the myth of scarcity once and for all, showing that in the kingdom of God, there is enough for everyone. Thanks be to God.