

### Matthew 14:13-21

When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food. Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." "We have here only five loaves and two fish," they answered. "Bring them here to me," he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand, besides women and children.



### "Accepting Direction"

"We have here only five loaves and two fish" they said.  
Bring them here to me," Jesus said.

Matthew 14:17

Anthony D. Mello, SJ told the story: Once upon a time a disciple asked the elder, "Holy One, is there anything I can do to make myself Enlightened?" "As little as you can do to make the sun rise in the morning." "Then of what use," the disciple asked, "are all the spiritual exercises?" "To make sure," the elder said, "that you are not asleep when the sun begins to rise."

The third step, in the twelve steps of the 1,500 year old Benediction spiritual way to inner freedom, is to be willing to accept direction from spiritual mentors. Joan Chittister wrote: "The third step to inner freedom is calling us to accept direction until we can function without it. Taking direction is part of growing up. The ability to open ourselves to the direction of others gives us a balanced confidence in ourselves, the power to control ourselves, and the insight to guide others. Everyone needs someone to mentor them from darkness to light, from the strange to the familiar, from the difficult to the practiced. But we cannot have someone hold our hands forever. Finally, in some difficult moment we find ourselves all alone. Then only the resources buried within us are the final measure of our ability to function well under pressure of all kinds---moral, social, and spiritual. We come to the point of spiritual adulthood. We develop the power that counts, the power to control ourselves. The third step to inner freedom can save us from our headstrong selves by urging us to accept direction. (The Way to Inner Freedom, p. 19)

As evening approached, the disciples came to Jesus and said, "This is a remote place and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." But because they didn't know what they didn't know, and because Jesus didn't want them to be asleep to kingdom miracles, Jesus gave them some counter-intuitive



instructions: "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

The gospels describe Jesus as a compassionate man who helped people at their point of need. One of the basic human needs that he attended to frequently was food. He ate Passover meals with his disciples; he ate with questionable people in low places; and, he fed crowds numbering in the thousands on the spur of the moment. He was a down to earth man who used images of food in his parables to teach about God and how God's heavenly kingdom comes alive on earth and is fully realized among people. In the prayer that he taught his disciples he directed them to say, 'give us this day, our daily bread.' In 'Prayer for All People,' Michael Brown wrote: 'In antiquity, wheat was seen as a gracious gift of the deity. Yet wheat is not bread. This initial gracious act of God must be met by the activity of human beings who farm the land, harvest the wheat, mill it, and bake the bread. In other words, the creation of bread is a complex process involving both Divine and human cooperation. Thus, embedded in this petition is an ethic which recognizes that for human need to be met, humanity must not only depend upon God's cooperation but must also depend upon the cooperation of other human beings. This is why the bread is identified as "our" not "my" bread in the Lord's Prayer.'

'And Jesus directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people.'

Matt. 14:19

In her sermon, "The Problem with Miracles," Barbara Brown Taylor wrote (p. 51-52): "Some of the crowd must have laughed out loud, while some of them were mystified and still others were embarrassed for Jesus, that he should have promised so much with so little to deliver. But I wonder if some of them were not touched, too---touched by the way the disciples handed over all they had, and touched by Jesus' simple confidence that it would be enough. I wonder if they did not look at that small basket of food going around and feel the food hidden in their own pockets

begin to burn holes in them. Because you know they had some—a bit of lamb wrapped in a grape leaf, a few raisins, a chunk of bread left over from breakfast. You know some of them had tucked a little something away before heading off on foot to a lonely place apart. Wouldn't you have done the same thing? But it would not have been enough to share, so chances are that those with something to eat kept it hidden—wrapped in a handkerchief, stuffed up a sleeve—waiting for an opportune moment to go off for a walk alone and sneak a bite. And it might have worked, too. They might have been able to keep their own food for themselves if that bread basked had not come around, full of scraps, everyone so careful not to break off too much, everyone wanting Jesus' crazy idea to work so much that very carefully, very secretly, they all began to put their own bread in the basket, reaching in as if they were taking some out and leaving some behind instead, so that the meal grew and grew, so that when the disciples collected the broken pieces at the end they stared in amazement at twelve baskets full of bread—wheat bread, sourdough, pumpernickel, rye, raisin bread, pita bread, bagels, and maybe even as oat bran muffin or two—every kind of bread you can think of, the leftovers from a meal for five thousand that started off with five blessed and broken loaves.'

The gospel story ends with an often overlooked kingdom directive. "The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children." Matthew did not have to include women and children . . . but he did. He probably chose to do so because as Biblical history suggests, one problem with the early church was that it often counted out souls, that Jesus counted in. Male privilege, status, and power excluded those less valued in society. Perhaps Matthew thought that the followers of Jesus in generations to come, needed to know that doing the will of God means to make sure that everyone gets to eat . . . 'until all are satisfied.'

Prayer. Dear God, lead us from darkness to light as we break bread together at the table of our Lord. Amen