

John 6:5-23

After Giving Thanks

Once there was a family that was not rich and not poor. They lived in Ohio in a small country house. One night they all sat down for dinner, and there was a knock at the door. The father went to the door and opened it.

There stood an old man in tattered clothes, with ripped pants and missing buttons. He was carrying a basket full of vegetables. He asked the family if they wanted to buy some vegetables from him. They quickly did because they wanted him to leave.

Over time, the family and the old man became friends. The man brought vegetables to the family every week. They soon found out that he was almost blind and had cataracts on his eyes. But he was so friendly that they learned to look forward to his visits and started to enjoy his company.

One day as he was delivering the vegetables, he said, "I had the greatest blessing yesterday! I found a basket of clothes outside my house that someone had left for me."

The family, knowing that he needed clothes, said, "how wonderful!"

The old blind man said, "The most wonderful part is that I found a family that really needed the clothes."¹

As I read this story written by Jerry Ullman, I found all kinds of moments of blessing within the story. Places where gratitude could be the response. It was in the ability to grow vegetables, in the building up of the relationship, the response of love that the family would buy clothing for the gentleman, and then the response that brings a smile to one's face of the man being so generous, feeling that his needs were met, that he didn't even see his own need for clothing but looked to the needs of others.

There is a saying that you may have heard, have an attitude of gratitude. One source I looked up said that gratitude is the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness. I like that, as it truly describes the actions of all in the story.

¹ Ullman, Jerry. *Chicken Soup for the Kid's Soul: 101 Stories of Courage, Hope and Laughter*. Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Patty Hansen and Irene Dunlap editors. Health Communications, Inc. Deerfield Beach Florida. 1998. P162-163.

Gratitude is what caught my attention in the story from scripture as well. The feeding of the 5000 is one of the most well-known stories from scripture, it can be found in some version in all four gospels so we know it was and is a significant story. What is lovely is that the abundance of food starts out as a boy's lunch of five barley loaves and two fish. In fact, when Andrew tells Jesus that he has this food, knowing that it is not even a drop in a bucket when it comes to the need and the crowd they are faced with, he must have anticipated a different response from Jesus than the one he got.

Jesus said to Andrew and the others, "Make the people sit down." I wonder what was the look on the disciples' faces. What do you mean, make the people sit down? What the heck is Jesus going to do with five loaves and two fish? Well, the first this Jesus does is take the loaves and give thanks. It was not until Jesus gave thanks that the food was distributed and all had as much as they want. Of course, you know the rest. It is when all were satisfied that Jesus told his disciples to "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." (v12)

The disciples, the people, and Jesus go from having five loaves and two fish to an abundance that finds that, after all have eaten, there were still twelve baskets filled with food. Yes, this is a miracle story. And whether or not you believe in miracles, the meaning remains, that there was abundance. What I would like to you sit with though is that before the abundance happened and the leftovers were gathered, Jesus took the loaves and gave thanks.

The first act was that of thanksgiving, and attitude of gratitude.

Now, I could not tell you how many times I have read these words of scripture, but it is a lot, and it was not until I was preparing for this worship service it was pointed out in my reading that later on in verse 23 it says, "Then some boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks."

A whole lot has happened between the time when Jesus takes the loaves and gives thanks and feeds the multitude, but what is remembered the next day is that this is the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. John does not write, this is the place where the miracle happened, but rather it was the place where Jesus had expressed gratitude to God. We don't know what Jesus' exact words were, yet we know that there was provision, gratitude, and abundance.

This last month the sermon series has been called *Our Grateful Hymn of Praise* and I have been using the resources from Discipleship Ministries, but this is the first time I have wanted to directly quote the writer, Rev. Dr. Derek Weber. I really appreciate what he has to say, so let me share his words.

John doesn't call it a miracle place. He says that it is the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks.

Really? That's the description? Not where an amazing thing happened. Not where the unexplainable took place. No, where they ate after the Lord had given

thanks. Think about it. That's what John wants us to remember: that this meal, this miracle happened after gratitude was expressed. Gratitude for the abundance that didn't look like abundance. Gratitude for the satisfaction that came out of hunger. Gratitude becomes a way of seeing and a way of being in the world. We give thanks to God for what is about to happen. We give thanks for what we might not yet see, but what we trust God will provide.

...It is about the spiritual discipline of gratitude. Like any discipline, it is one that we choose and then work at until we become better at it. We live, because of that choice, grateful to God first of all for the abundance that surrounds us. But gratitude spills over into the rest of our lives as well. We are grateful for those in our circles of care; we are grateful to those who help us live in the manner to which we have become accustomed. We recognize that none of the benefits we enjoy come without effort on someone's part, and we learn to be grateful to those who help make our society run smoothly. If we were to make a list of all those who provide for us, who care for us, who stand with us, we would probably never get to the end. We are truly woven together in a human tapestry of love and caring. Jesus invites us to become more aware of that reality and to live gratefully every day.²

May each of us practice the spiritual discipline of gratitude, knowing it truly does take practice. It is an attitude that is developed and cultivated. It means looking at each situation and finding something that hones in us the quality of being thankful; ready to show appreciation for and to return kindness.

As the Apostle Paul writes in the first letter to the church in Thessalonica, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 Thess. 5:18). Amen.

²Rev. Dr. Derek Weber. [Discipleship Ministries | Christ the King / Reign of Christ Sunday.... \(umcdiscipleship.org\)](https://umcdiscipleship.org) Accessed November 24, 2023.