

God is doing the impossible.

They were busy. Life had brought them all sorts of ups and downs – some things going well – some things going terribly wrong. So they tried to step back a little bit – get some time for themselves. And then it happened. It got even tougher. They were asked to do something that seemed impossible.

You know who I'm talking about right? You. I know, it sounded a little like the disciples in our text, getting back from their mission trips, finding out about the beheading of their co-worker, exhausted, and getting back to find more work to be done. Then they try to get away by themselves, only to find even more work – 5000+ people that wanted their help. I suppose it fits them too.

But really, isn't that you? Your life has been a roller coaster hasn't it? There are all sorts of things occupying your mind, all sorts of demands on your time. You get busy. You have successes. You have challenges. But it seems like it is just one thing after the other. We could probably learn the same lesson Jesus taught to his disciples in our Gospel lesson today. **God is doing the impossible.**

It's one of the most famous stories about Jesus – the only miracle recorded in such detail in all four gospels. Now we could focus on Jesus' great unselfishness and his gut-wrenching love for the people when he got off that boat looking for some quiet time and instead found the crowd hounding him. But that's what I preached about last time I had this text. This time, I want to get a little further in the story. I want us to see the lesson Jesus teaches us here about OUR faith, about love, unselfishness, trust. Really the lesson is this: **God is doing the impossible.**

So there they are, and Jesus is teaching a lesson. He's teaching. He's talking. He's loving... and it's getting late. It's a remote place. There are a ton of people there. Then, here comes Phillip, able to notice the problem, but not see the solution. So Jesus teaches.

Can you hear it? "Jesus, we've got to get rid of the people or they'll all go hungry." Jesus says: "You give them something to eat." "Yeah right, good one Jesus!" He keeps a straight face. "But, Jesus, that would cost us more than \$10,000." Still, the straight face: "So, you're saying you don't have enough? Go check. How much do you have?" One lunch box. "This is it. Five loaves - maybe enough to give each of the disciples a small snack, and 2 fish, basically the sardines that would be spread on those pieces of bread."

“Sounds good,” Jesus says, “let’s have the people sit down and eat.” Think about that – multiply this crowd by 50 and you still probably aren’t there. Feed them from one lunch box. But you know how the story goes. They sat them down. Jesus prayed, and Jesus did the impossible.

But, when I began, I said I was talking about us in that scene. John’s account of this tells us that Jesus asked Philip about getting food for the people only to test him – fully knowing what he was intending to do. Think of how often he does that with you. Here’s a situation – how are *you* going to handle it?

Your budget is tight. What are you going to do? Where are you going to look? Your relationship is bad. What are *you* going to do? How will this get fixed? Your family member is sick. What are *you* going to do? How will *you* cope? You see what I’m getting at. He sets us up to see where we turn first, to give us a chance to trust in him first – because, truth be told, in all of those things, no matter how much we might try to convince ourselves that we actually accomplish – there really is no solution that will come from *us*. It has to start with Him. Yes, he’ll tell us what to do to make it happen – but it can only come from him.

You could even take this empty piece of land behind me as an example. Have you seen God putting those obstacles in front of us and watching? Here’s a small congregation that wants to reach out to its community, but it’s so expensive to build. What are *you* going to do? And then God blesses us with the opportunity to buy land. OK, so we buy land, a big piece, with the intent of selling some of it off and then the land market goes south. What are *you* going to do? Then God brings the perfect buyer. Now, it’s building time, we’ve got a contractor and we’ve got a price and we’re applying for the loan and the payments are more than our current offerings would handle. What are *you* going to do? You think God has a plan? Doesn’t it happen all too often that we try to take the credit from God and try to pretend that we are the ones - that can fix things... that can make them happen... that can be, well, God?!

You see what I’m saying? But let me put it in perspective. Sure, getting land, and getting to the point where we are able to make our down payment and getting to where we are now – those are big things, don’t get me wrong. But that’s nothing compared with what our real obstacles were. Really, looking at the stat sheet – none of this would really matter. Looking at our record – we shouldn’t even be able to talk to God, much less build him a house. God is holy. We aren’t. His justice can’t tolerate sin. That means us. We rebel against God, attack

him every time we look to ourselves first. The wages of sin is death. That was an obstacle.

And you see how people try to handle that one. “I’ll just be a little better.” “I’ll just try my hardest.” “I’ll just give more.” No, those things don’t change the fact that we’ve sinned. We’ve broken the perfection that was demanded and we deserve death. Now that is a problem. What are *you* going to do about it? There’s nothing we could do.

We have about as much power to fix this situation as the disciples did with the food situation that day. But look at who has power. Jesus knew what he was going to do and he did it. He filled the stomachs of that crowd that would have covered all the open grass you see here, he filled their stomachs with virtually nothing – and “**they were satisfied**,” it says. Think about that.

He did the same with our real problem - sin, with our relationship with God. He knew what he was going to do. And he did it. He did the impossible. The sin of our fathers all the way back to Adam and Eve brings us into this world in sin... But that’s the only way we can be born, right, mom and dad, right? There’s no other way. Jesus did the impossible. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary - no human father.

Or how about this? Our sinful flesh and weakness against Satan’s temptation cuts off every solution for our sin. So Jesus, true God, had strength to destroy those temptations. Our record is marred and marked and disgusting when you get right down to it. So Jesus gives us his. We couldn’t do anything to deserve that precisely because our sin kept dragging us down. So Jesus makes it a free gift. Our sins deserved their wages – death. So Jesus died, and was buried, and on the third day rose again from the dead. Even death is defeated for us. God is doing the impossible.

And he’s teaching us a lesson as he’s doing it. You know how he asked those disciples – “What do you have?” and they had to answer, in essence, “nothing – nothing that can solve this situation – just 5 small loaves and a couple anchovies.” And Jesus says – “Bring it to me.”

When Jesus asks us “What do you have?” when it comes to fixing our guilt problem, our shame problem, our sin – our answer is even clearer – “nothing.” “I have nothing God, all I have is you.” As we sang a while ago – “Just as I am without one plea but that thy blood was shed for me and that thou bidst me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.” And God does the impossible – he takes our nothing and puts His son’s everything on it. And more than even those believers on

that hillside – we are satisfied – knowing that it is all taken care of, knowing that we are God’s.

So now, as God’s children, like the disciples, we get to handle all those tests and watch God doing the impossible. What are you going to do about your income issues or health scares or relationship woes? Look to see what God’s doing. Don’t waste a minute stressing over it. Look to see what he asks you to do in his Word. And what does he say? “What do you have?” “Bring them to me.”

On that hillside, what would have been going through your mind at that moment? You know Jesus. You know he’s great at loving and taking care of people. But he just asked you to bring your dinner so he can give it away – and you are quite a ways from being anywhere you’d be able to replace it. You think the thought “Well, what am I going to eat?” ever crossed their minds? That was a test, wasn’t it? That’s what John tells us. And they brought it. Common logic tells you that if you give it away, you don’t have it. That’s not the way it works with God. Don’t think that detail at the end insignificant. Remember, they started with one basketful to share... **“and the disciples picked up twelve basketfulls of broken pieces of bread and fish.”** Twelve, huh? How many disciples were there again?

That’s how our God works. When we put him first, he will not let us be left behind. He will take care of us, not always like we imagined – better.

So apply that. The relationship is bad because neither of you think you’re being treated as you deserve and so you’re hesitant with your love. Listen to Jesus’ instructions and give that unconditional love anyway –and see how God does the impossible. The money situation is hard because the priorities have gotten out of whack. Listen to Jesus’ instructions about what is truly important and give it to him and see if he doesn’t make you rich – in ways money could never accomplish.

Or back to this building we will God-willing be watching go up in the next months. You want to make that happen? God asks, “what do you have?” Well, I’ve only got a little time – “Bring it to me,” Jesus says, “and we’ll see what we can do.” “I only make enough to get by” – “Bring it to me” and let’s see what happens. “I am not exceptionally skilled at anything” – “Bring those talents to me” and let’s watch. Now, I’m not promising you riches or ease of living. God doesn’t promise those things. But put it all in God’s hands and you’ll see, **Our God does the impossible.**

He made you his. He gave you heaven. And as an added bonus, he gave us today. Let’s celebrate that.

In Christ, Amen.