

John 6:1–13 (CEB)

After this Jesus went across the Galilee Sea (that is, the Tiberias Sea). ² A large crowd followed him, because they had seen the miraculous signs he had done among the sick. ³ Jesus went up a mountain and sat there with his disciples. ⁴ It was nearly time for Passover, the Jewish festival.

⁵ Jesus looked up and saw the large crowd coming toward him. He asked Philip, “Where will we buy food to feed these people?” ⁶ Jesus said this to test him, for he already knew what he was going to do.

⁷ Philip replied, “More than a half year’s salary worth of food wouldn’t be enough for each person to have even a little bit.”

⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said, ⁹ “A youth here has five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that for a crowd like this?”

¹⁰ Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass there. They sat down, about five thousand of them. ¹¹ Then Jesus took the bread. When he had given thanks, he distributed it to those who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish, each getting as much as they wanted. ¹² When they had plenty to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather up the leftover pieces, so that nothing will be wasted.” ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves that had been left over by those who had eaten.

Are we really, truly passionate servants of Jesus?

The multiplication of the loaves and the fish is the only miracle story told in all four gospels. Not surprisingly, we find Andrew right in the middle of it.

John’s gospel

Though written from differing perspectives and for varied audiences, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke share much material. Matthew and Luke probably had a copy of Mark’s Gospel when they wrote their own. Indeed, the three Gospels are often referred to as the synoptic Gospels, meaning simply “read together,” emphasizing some of their similarities.

But John’s Gospel is quite different. It was the last to be written and shares little material with the other three. For example, only one of the miracles recounted in the synoptic Gospels is found in the Gospel of John and vice versa – the feeding of the five thousand. John is very clear about why he wrote another Gospel: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:30-31). In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus’ miracles are enactments of God’s kingdom. For example, in the kingdom of God there are no blind or lame, so Jesus makes the blind see and the lame walk. But in John’s Gospel, Jesus’ miracles are signs to his true identity.

More than a miracle

On the surface, this miracle story is pretty simple. Jesus has crossed over the Sea of Galilee to a northern shore where a large crowd awaits him. When he sees the size of the crowds, Jesus asks Philip how the people are to be fed. Philip replies that they certainly don’t have the money to feed them when Andrew walks up with a boy right behind him. Andrew tells Jesus that the boy has five loaves of barley bread and two fish . . . enough only for a few.

So why does Andrew bring the boy to Jesus? What does he imagine Jesus will do with a few loaves and a couple of fish? Perhaps Andrew already understands that Jesus is all about possibilities, not limitations. He is ready to entrust this to Jesus, just as he has

entrusted all else to him. So Jesus takes the loaves and fish, blesses them, and then distributes them. Miraculously, there is enough to feed fifteen or twenty thousand people. Everyone got all they wanted and more.

More than a miracle

But we would be mistaken if we understood this story to be about no more than Jesus' astounding powers. Instead, this is a profoundly rich story that taps into the very core of the Christian faith. There is more going on than we can do justice to in this brief study, but here are a few keys:

- John notes that this miracle happened during Passover, which celebrates the Exodus of Moses and the Israelites from Egypt. Thus, John introduces the theme of the Exodus and God's provision for his people which figures so prominently in this chapter.
- Jesus knows what he is going to do to feed the crowds, but he wants to know if Philip, Andrew, and the other of his close disciples know. Have they begun to grasp the source of Jesus' power and, hence, his identity? Perhaps Andrew has, at least a bit. Throughout the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, even his closest disciples have great difficulty truly grasping whom it is that they follow.
- John's Gospel was written late in the first century. The Christian community had shared the Lord's Supper, the eucharist¹, for decades. Jesus' taking of the bread, giving thanks, and distributing it is clearly evocative of the sacred meal shared by all Christians.
- Just as Moses instructed the people to pick up all the manna, Jesus makes sure that all the uneaten fragments are gathered up. Truly, God not only provides for our most basic needs (like food) but does so to overflowing. And it is not an accident that there are twelve baskets filled with the leftovers, for twelve tribes constituted the people of God.

Andrew – the passionate doer

Many years ago, Leo Buscaglia wrote an oddly named book, *Bus 9 to Paradise*. It was a book about passion. His premise was simple. To lead fulfilling and happy lives, he said, we need a passion, something that gets us up every morning excited to discover what the new day holds. For Buscaglia, it wasn't important what we are passionate about, only that we have a passion in life. We could go from one passion to another. The nature of the passion was not the point, nor its endurance – it was simply having one.

I've always thought there was a lot of truth in Buscaglia's premise. Passion turns the world from black-and-white into full, living color. It is like the moment when Dorothy steps out of her house into Oz. Or the movie, *Pleasantville*, if you remember it.

What does Andrew do when he first meets Jesus? He runs to get his brother. Now, in the face of hungry crowds, he had hurriedly brought a young boy to Jesus. Again, I picture Andrew being the passionate doer, always ready to press ahead, to get things done. Next week, we'll come to a story of Andrew that again hints at his readiness to act.

I don't know if you have passions in your life, but here's the question for us all. Do we have a genuine passion for Jesus? Yes, we are Christians; but are we *passionate* Christians? We are disciples, but are we *passionate* disciples? Are we *passionate* believers? Are we *passionate* servants of our Lord?

¹ Though in Methodism we don't often use the word "eucharist" to denote the Lord's Supper, it comes from the Greek word *euchariseo* meaning "giving thanks." John uses it in v. 5 when Jesus gives thanks over the loaves.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. In this miraculous feeding, Jesus visibly demonstrates that God provides for his people, just as he provided manna in the desert centuries before. What does this say about God's provision for us? In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches his disciples that we are not to worry or be anxious about anything! Discuss what you really think is going on here. Why does Jesus say and do these things? How do we apply this "don't worry God will feed us" stuff in our everyday lives?
2. How can we become more passionate disciples? What will you commit to doing in the next six months that you haven't done before? How can St. Andrew become a passionate church? What ought we to do in the next six months that we haven't done before?

Daily Bible Readings

This week: The bread of passion

Monday, Exodus 16 God feeds the Israelites in the Sinai Wilderness

Tuesday, John 6:22-71 Jesus is the bread of life

Wednesday, Matthew 6:25-34 God provides, so we need not worry!

Thursday, 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 A passionate church is generous

Friday, Ephesians 4:1-16 A passionate church is unified and mature.

Saturday, Colossians 1:3-14 A passionate church is faithful and thankful.

Scott Engle's Weekday Bible Classes

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own.

This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott has to cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Monday Evening Class

We are studying Paul's letter, 1 Thessalonians.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the story of Esther.

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Our current series: *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: The Kings of Israel*