

As Much as They Wanted

sermon digest

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John 6:1-21

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In a world filled with so much bad news, it's easy to be cynical. All we have to do is turn on the TV or open the newspaper to know that things are not good. We face one of the most devastating economic crises since the Great Depression. The stock market is like a roller coaster and retirement savings are dwindling. Home values are plummeting and foreclosures continue to rise. Wars seem to go on endlessly. Natural disasters leave people homeless and in need. Leaders compromise their ethics for personal gain. Over and over again we hear bad news and it seems to make us jaded and cynical.

So, when we come to a passage of Scripture like the reading we heard today from the Gospel of John, it's easy to be skeptical and cynical. We wonder how Jesus could really do all these things that John says that he did. Yeah, right – Jesus fed 5000 people with a few loaves of bread and some fish. Do you really expect us to believe that Jesus walked on water? These are nice stories, but if Jesus could do this, why can't He fix the stock market? Why doesn't Jesus just intervene and wipe out the Swine Flu?

However, what I want to suggest to you today is that these are precisely the stories that we need to be reading during these very uncertain times. We need to be reading them because they remind us that God is a God Who provides for us. They are stories that remind us that God is with us in our need and our life's circumstances. They are stories that remind us of God's wonderful and amazing power in the world and for our lives. So, it's in light of this Good News, that I'd like us to take a closer look at these miracle stories of Jesus.

First, I want to suggest that these miracle stories of Jesus remind us that God thinks big. One of my favorite stories about someone who dreamed big is a guy named Larry. Larry's boyhood dream was to fly. But fates conspired to keep him from his dream. He joined the Air Force, but his poor eyesight disqualified him from the job of pilot. After he was discharged from the military, he sat in his backyard watching jets fly overhead.

Larry hatched his weather balloon scheme while sitting outside his "extremely comfortable" Sears lawn chair. He purchased 45 weather balloons from an Army-Navy surplus store, tied them to his tethered lawn chair dubbed the Inspiration I, and filled the 4' diameter balloons with helium. Then he strapped himself into his lawn chair with some sandwiches, Miller Lite beer, and a pellet gun. He figured he would pop a few of the many balloons when it was time to descend.

Larry's plan was to sever the anchor and lazily float up to a height of about 30 feet above his back yard, where he would enjoy a few hours of flight before coming back down. But things didn't work out quite as Larry planned.

When his friends cut the cord anchoring the lawn chair to his Jeep, he did not float lazily up to 30 feet. Instead, he streaked into the LA sky as if shot from a cannon, pulled by the lift of 42 helium balloons holding 33 cubic feet of helium each. He didn't level off at 100 feet, nor did he level off at 1000 feet. After climbing and climbing, he leveled off at 16,000 feet.

At that height he felt he couldn't risk shooting any of the balloons, lest he unbalance the load and really find himself in trouble. So he stayed there, drifting cold and frightened with his beer and sandwiches, for more than 14 hours. He crossed the primary approach corridor of LAX, where Trans World Airlines and Delta Airlines pilots radioed in reports of the strange sight.

Eventually he gathered the nerve to shoot a few balloons, and slowly descended. The hanging tethers tangled and caught in a power line, blacking out a Long Beach neighborhood for 20 minutes. Larry climbed to safety, where he was arrested by waiting members of the LAPD. As he was led away in handcuffs, a reporter dispatched to cover the daring rescue asked him why he had done it. Larry replied nonchalantly, "A man can't just sit around."

The Federal Aviation Administration was not amused. Safety Inspector Neal Savoy said, "We know he broke some part of the Federal Aviation Act, and as soon as we decide which part it is, a charge will be filed." (Taken from darwinawards.com)

Larry thought really big. Jesus also thinks really big. He could have performed this miracle of the feeding when it was just a small group of his disciples gathered together. Jesus could have performed this miracle when he was at someone's home for dinner. But instead, Jesus decided he wanted to reveal God's power in a big way. He decides to provide food for 5000 people.

It's so laughable; Phillip says six months' wages could not buy that much food. But Jesus does it and there's not just enough. There's more than enough. John tells us that people ate "as much as they wanted" and there were twelve baskets of leftovers. The same thing is true in our lives. God wants to bless us in big ways. God wants to bless us beyond our wildest dreams.

One of the ways in which God did this in my life is when I first started working with Habitat for Humanity. I was serving as the Volunteer Coordinator. One of my duties was to recruit volunteers. I remember one day I was really frustrated with this. I was calling people and practically begging them to help us build houses. I went into Susan's office and started whining. I was ready to give up. After I got this off my chest, I went back to my office and began to continue trying to recruit volunteers. Within a few hours, the phone rang and I answered it. It was a woman representing a youth publishing house that sponsors summer youth mission trips. She said that she had found housing nearby for youth and wondered if we could use some volunteers. I asked her how many and she told me that we could have as many as 100 volunteers for eight weeks that summer. Talk about God doing things in a big way, this was huge! God wants to bless us in huge ways in our lives. God thinks big.

Along with this, in providing for us, God wants to partner with us. Sometimes it's easy to think all we have to do is ask God and then sit back and let God do all the work. However, while God provides in our lives, often times invites us to partner with God.

Stop and think about it. Jesus could have snapped his fingers and provided Happy Meals for the entire crowd. Instead, Jesus partnered with a little boy who had some fish and loaves of bread who was willing to share.

Here's a modern day example of this same kind of thing. In a time of crisis, Angela Logan turned to her kitchen.

Faced with a July 26 payment of \$2559.54 to her mortgage lender, Logan decided to sell 100 homemade "mortgage apple cakes" to friends and family for \$40 each to help avoid foreclosure.

They must be pretty darn good: What started last week as 42 orders for the double layered cakes (covered in butter, cream cheese and vanilla frosting) has turned into something much bigger. As of Tuesday, she had more than 500 orders, including an order from Iraq and one from Hong Kong.

Logan, a divorced mother of three sons, had owned her home in Teaneck, NJ, for 20 years. She started to have financial difficulties after a contractor cost her \$50,000 in damages. She applied to the "Making Home Affordable" program after receiving a foreclosure notice in January. Logan has to make three payments of about \$2500 by October 1 in order to keep her home.

Soon Logan's problem was how she could possibly bake hundreds of cakes in her small kitchen. Teaneck's health officer notified Logan that it was against state law to use her house as a commercial kitchen, The Associated Press reported. So the Hilton Hasbrouck Heights is letting her use the hotel's kitchen, where she can produce up to 10 cakes at a time.

"It's been like a dream," Logan told the Bergen Record. "I am speechless. I won't call it overwhelming, because when you get a blessing, you just don't complain. I'll take overwhelming over fear and anguish any day of the week." (Elizabeth Strott – MSNBC)

In providing for our needs, God invites us into relationship. God taps into the resources and gifts that we already have. In the end, God not only provides for and blesses us but also provides for and blesses others as well.

Finally, in providing for us, God seeks to teach us about the very nature of God. When Jesus walked on the water, he was teaching his disciples about trust and overcoming fear. When Jesus fed the 5000, Jesus was teaching the disciples about God's power and desire to provide for us. The same is true in our lives. Whenever God blesses you and provides for you, there are wonderful lessons to be learned about God's love and grace and mercy.

One final story I would like to share with you. A few years ago the *Boston Globe* published a story about an unusual wedding banquet. A couple had gone to the Hyatt Hotel in downtown Boston to plan their wedding, and every detail they selected they were determined to be the very best—food, china, flowers, music. They both had expensive taste, and the bill showed it—many thousands of dollars—and half of it was due on the spot as a down-payment.

Everything was moving along smoothly until the day the wedding invitations were to go in the mail, when the groom announced that he couldn't go through with it. He just wasn't sure.

Now the hurt and angry bride-to-be had to go back to the Hyatt to cancel the banquet, only to learn that there was no way to get back the down-payment. The contract was binding. There were only two options—to forfeit the down-payment or to go ahead with the party.

The bride was of course outraged at this. But the more she thought about it, the clearer she was that she would go ahead with the party. Now, though, it wouldn't be a wedding banquet, but instead just a great big blowout. As a matter of fact, ten years before this woman had been living in a homeless shelter. But she had managed to get back on her feet over time, had taken a good job, and had eventually made a lot of money. Now she had the idea of throwing a big party for her old friends, the down-and-outs of Boston.

And so in June of 1990 the Hyatt Hotel had a party the likes of which no one had ever quite seen. The jilted bride changed the menu to boneless chicken—"in honor of the groom," she said—and sent invitations to the homeless shelters and rescue missions in the city. And so that summer evening people accustomed to finding their meals in the trash bins of the city made their way through the grand lobby of the Hyatt to a meal of chicken *cordons bleus*. Black-tied waiters served hors d'oeuvres to people with rags wrapped around them. Many had their bags of worldly goods with them, reminders of the hard life they were living. But for this night they were treated like kings and queens—sipping champagne, eating chocolate wedding cake, dancing into the night. [from Philip Yancey's *What's So Amazing About Grace?*]

My friends, here's some really, really Good News. We, who because of sin and our rebellious nature, deserve to be eating out of dumpsters in life, instead find ourselves blessed by a God who loves us and provides for our every need. No matter whom you are or what you've done, there is nothing you can do or say or think or feel that will ever stop God from loving you. God knows your fears, your struggles, your pain, your anxiety, your health problems, your brokenness, your loneliness, and your doubts and God offers you love beyond your wildest dreams.

Right here, right now, God is calling your name to a life of hope and love, to a life of grace and forgiveness, to a life of power and faith. God loves you and longs to provide for you as you continue along this journey of life.

God thinks big. God longs to partner with you. God seeks to teach you and bless you because you are a precious child of God. Thanks be to God! Amen.