

## **Title:** God's Abundant Provision and Multiplication

**Subtitle:** God takes what we offer him, insufficient as it may be, and not only uses it but multiplies it.

**Video URL:** <https://youtu.be/2UFQl-wx3b4?si=EHgpEV1251-qcyER>

Each of the four evangelists—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, records the miracle in which Jesus used five small barley loaves and two fish to feed over five thousand people just before the annual Jewish feast of Passover. John calls the miracle a sign because of all that it signifies.

In each of the accounts, the disciples wanted to send the crowds away so that they could buy their own food, but Jesus looked at the crowds with compassion and took action. But before doing so, he asked Philip (the most analytical of the disciples), “Where are we to buy bread so that these people may eat?” John mentions that Jesus questioned Philip to “test” him.

There are lots of reasons why Jesus may have wanted to “test” Philip, but I can only imagine that what Jesus was about to do would certainly “test” the limits of Philip’s faith, just as it “tests” ours.

Too often, You and I want to arrange our lives so that we have to trust God for very little. But each act of love, where we engage with the needs of others, does indeed test us. Interestingly, my experience with other church vestries has confirmed this notion, where there is a tendency to study the problems at hand but seem paralyzed when doing something about the dilemma.

You can see this tendency in Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, who had been out in the crowd, looking in the brown bags, the sack lunches, and had learned what was there and reported, ***“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and***

***two fish.”<sup>1</sup> But concluded, “But what good is that among so many?”<sup>2</sup>***

Then there are the loaves made of barley—commonly known as the poor man’s bread. Its use, in this case, is symbolic. It shows us that what we have to offer is often poorly esteemed. How frequently have you ever felt like saying, “*Lord, you do not understand my situation. If you only knew how I feel. I have calculated it all out, I have thought it all through, I have considered everything, and from my point of view, what I have doesn’t seem enough.*”

Who hasn’t felt this way? [When God began to place a call on my life, everyone else I could think of seemed much more talented than me.]

**Illustration:** Maybe you have heard the story about the man who was highly suspicious of doing too much for others. He said, “If you give these people too many handouts, they’ll get used to it and be back for more before you know it!”

One Sunday, some of his friends convinced him to tag along as they visited a large downtown parish where they helped serve a free community meal. As they arrived, he saw people lined up out the door and thought, “What difference will one lunch make?” “Most of them still have to sleep outside tonight.”

Despite his initial attitude, his friends got him to go back again. And again. After they had taken him four or five times, he got to know a few of the folks who remembered his name. But it wasn’t until he remembered their names that he finally started to understand the difference God was making in that place.

It was a difference that had very little to do with lumpy mashed potatoes and weak lemonade and much more to do with being named and claimed, with being called into relationships with others by serving those you didn’t even know needed you.

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<sup>1</sup> John 6:9a

<sup>2</sup> John 6:9b

This story illustrates what our opening collect means when we asked God to “*increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal.*”<sup>3</sup> In other words, we pray to live our earthly lives from a completely different perspective, which is made possible by the things God can do and did—and still does—in the person of Jesus Christ. And now he wants to do those same things through the Church, which we are a part of.

The Apostle Paul understood this perspective and was deeply moved by it. In our New Testament lesson, he wrote, “***For this cause, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.***”<sup>4</sup> There were relatively few occasions that Scripture records people kneeling to pray, but this is one of them due to his petition’s extraordinary nature and importance. The first and second-generation Christians who received these words faced extraordinary difficulties, for they witnessed their founding members – the apostles – and many of their brothers and sisters in the church face torture, exile, and even martyrdom. These trials threatened their existence, much like the storm-tossed sea that frightened the disciples in the boat in the episode that followed the feeding of the five thousand. Yet Jesus came walking towards them on the water, saying, “***It is I; don’t be afraid.***”<sup>5</sup>

The challenges they faced were overwhelming. Therefore, the prayer that they be “***strengthened in their inner being through the power of the Spirit***”<sup>6</sup> carried powerful significance because it would give them the resilience to endure.

The word “resilience” contains a timely message because with God’s power, we can bear all things, believe all things, hope

<sup>3</sup> BCP, p 231, Collect for Proper 12

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 3:14-15

<sup>5</sup> John 6:20

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 3:16

in all things, and endure all things. When a life is lived out of love, it has that kind of stamina. Paul’s personal testimony showed that while his “outer man” was being destroyed through unbelievably difficult and dangerous circumstances, such as beatings and imprisonments, his “inner man” was being renewed.”<sup>7</sup>

Paul’s second request was for “*Christ to dwell in your hearts through faith. And that you, being rooted and established in love, will have power, together with all the saints, to comprehend the length and width and height and depth of his love that surpasses knowledge.*”<sup>8</sup> Sublime as these words and descriptions may be, they are comprehended as faith and love work together in communion with the larger Church family. The implication that Paul intends is that we cannot learn the meaning of love in isolation from one another, but only as we live and work together. Paul then explains that God pours out his love toward us “*according to the riches of his glory,*”<sup>9</sup> which is grand beyond measure.

The faith for (and in) such abundance relates back to the Gospel because it challenges us to think beyond the usual, temporal terms of scarcity and human limitations. God has great things God wants to do through us (and in us) if we will only trust him.

There is a world out there hungry for the bread of life, so let’s do our part to ensure they get fed.

“*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen.*”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:16 “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 3:17-19

<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 3:16

<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 3:20-21