

**Matthew 14:13-21
Creekside COB
July 31, 2005**

“Having Enough and Then Some”

Days before my high school graduation, the senior guys came up with an idea for which the class of 1971 is still remembered. However, it was an idea the proprietor of a restaurant would rather forget. Someone posed a hypothetical question-"If we had enough guys, do you think we could eat all the food at the Gateway Smorgasbord?" All the food meant all the food. There was only one way to test the hypothesis.

The event was hailed, "The Senior Eat Out." When the Gateway doors opened for dinner, we marched in, nearly one hundred strong, and we made quick work of the first serving. The kitchen staff kept bringing out refill trays that we emptied in the time it took to get back to the kitchen. As other customers arrived, they stood at the steam table waiting for replacements of the trays we picked clean.

After about an hour of heavy feeding, a sheriff's deputy arrived. The manager called "the law" to do something about us. Members of the Eat Out Squad sitting nearby overheard the conversation. "Are they being disorderly or cutting in front of other customers?" "No, but..." "Did they pay for their meals?" "Well, yes, but..." "This is an all-you-can-eat restaurant?" "Yes, but can't you do something to get them out of here? The deputy said, "I can't arrest them for eating! Besides, judging from the looks of things I think they're winding down."

We looked and felt like a pod of beached whales. We gave it our best. We strained smorgasbord's inventory, but we didn't eat it out. We reminisce about that night at every reunion. Consider these individual statistics enshrined in gluttony lore: Rick Huddle downed 45 Salisbury steaks. Paul Peazly inhaled 60 sausages. Pat Truka went through a whole pie and most of a

second. I was tops in the shrimp category, eating 110 plus cocktail sauce. You could say we had enough and then some.

Let me tell you about another large group of hungry people that ate their fill. The account is found in the 14th chapter of Matthew. Jesus has just been told that John the Baptist was beheaded, so Jesus decides to go on retreat in a deserted place—a place to rest, think, reflect about John, and to pray. However, when Jesus and the disciples arrive at the deserted place, it isn't deserted.

When Jesus saw the crowd on shore waiting for him, he felt an emotion that I see as a proof of his divinity. It had been a long day. Jesus was tired and needed privacy, yet when he saw the people, he had compassion on them. He could have said, "I'm dog tired and have had all the needy people I can handle for one day," or "I'm closed. Come back tomorrow." Instead, the tremendous needs of the people inspired compassion. When pastors read this part, it impresses upon us how little we are like Jesus and how much we are like the disciples.

Come evening, the disciples took charge. "Jesus, you should tell the crowd they should go find themselves something to eat." "What food do we have on hand?" he asked them. "Five loaves of three-day-old bread and two measly fish," they said. Jesus' said there was enough to go around. There were 5,000 mouths to feed. The disciples ran the numbers on their calculators. "No way," they say to themselves. Jesus knew it couldn't be done, either...not without help from on high, so he took the bread and fish and looked up to heaven.

George Muller stood outside the dining room door of the orphanage. Inside seventy children were waiting for breakfast. Muller started the orphanage in Bristol, England fifteen years earlier, and did everything based on faith. He didn't know how he would pay the staff, but the money was always there. Even when the facility was at capacity, he never turned a child away. He trusted that God would provide, and God did. Now he wondered. The children were hungry, but there wasn't a crumb to feed them.

And yet, a voice inside told him to trust. God would find a way. Muller entered the dining room, smiled and said, "Let's pray.... Lord, you have promised to meet our every need. Now we thank you for the food you are about to supply." The children waited for the kitchen doors to open, but they didn't. There was anxious silence, then a knock at the door. When Muller opened it, there stood the local baker. "Mr. Muller, I woke up real early this mornin' and couldn't get back to sleep, so I decided to bake some bread for your children. Can I bring it in?" A little later there was another knock. It was the milkman. "My wagon broke down I've got to get rid of twenty cans of milk so I can get back to the store. Can you use them?"

Muller's ministry continued another forty-five years, and he touched the lives of over 10,000 children. George Muller discovered again and again that not only does God provide, but provides in abundance.

Jesus looked to heaven, with total trust in God's provision. See him standing there praying as the hungry crowd looks on. With the same words Jesus would speak when he offered the first communion in the upper room, Matthew says he, "...blessed, broke, and gave the loaves to the disciples who gave them to the crowds."

You've heard it said that, "Little is much when God is in it." Bread & Fish Helper wasn't available back then but five loaves and two fish stretched a long way to feed many people. Matthew says, "They all ate their fill and were satisfied." They didn't get a symbolic meal with just a bite of each. They all ate. That was a miracle. They ate until they were satisfied. That was a miracle plus. But Matthew adds another detail... "they took up twelve baskets of leftovers." That was an extreme miracle. They had enough and then some.

An efficiency expert might read this and think, "Excessive waste. Twelve baskets of leftovers." A cook might read it and think, "He didn't know how to plan for a crowd." But when people hungering in body and soul read it, they see scarcity

turned to abundance. They see Jesus offering not "just enough" grace to get them by. They see grace in excess... without limit.

If you haven't noticed, God has a habit of "over-doing" things. Why are there thousands of bird species? How many varieties of orchids do we need? Isn't one breed of cats enough? Our sun is just a minor star among the 100 billion stars in the Milky Way galaxy. I heard that if you hold out a dime at arm's length against the night sky, you are blocking 15 million stars from your sight, if you could see that far. Why all the stars? Why all the wasted space in the universe for a measly planet like ours?

God goes crazy with creation. We impose limits. We establish speed limits. Fisher-people can't exceed their bag limit. You are limited to a fixed number of exemptions on your income tax. "Jesus... how many times do I have to forgive my neighbor, seven times? Come on, give me a limit. What!? You're joking. Seventy times seven?"

Ask people like Eileen Rohrer about love and limits. Her life is a testimony to the fact that love is a renewable resource. How many people have been recipients of her care? How many rides did she give to the grocery store? How often did she pick up friends who had no transportation, and bring them to church? Even now as she is confined to home, she continues to care. On any given day, somewhere in the U.S. postal system, there is a card Eileen has sent someone. She is physically limited; she draws on the desire planted within her to show love for people.

Think of the busy people you know. No matter how involved they are they have a remarkable ability to take on responsibilities and do what needs to be done. God has gifted everyone to do him a specific service, which is why we are going to help each other discover our gifts. When we operate out of our spiritual gifts, we don't stress out wear out or burn out. Our gifts energize us as we do God's business.

We are debtors to the grace of Jesus. We underestimate his love for us. He doesn't dispense just enough grace to get us through the day. He responds to our indebtedness and scarcity with his

abundance. He is able to fill our hearts with more love than our hearts can hold. There is enough love left over to fill at least twelve baskets.

Sit down sometime and take an inventory of the stories Jesus told. Notice how often the outcomes involve excess. At a wedding party Jesus turned six, thirty-gallon jars of water into wine. 180 gallons! Donald Trump would have to throw a lot of parties to finish off that much wine!

A Good Samaritan finds a man who has been mugged lying half-conscious in a ditch. He drives him to a clinic, gives the lady in admissions all his credit cards and tells her if its not enough to cover the poor guy's treatment, he'll be back later to pay the rest. Excess!

After he broke his father's heart and made a mess of his own life, the prodigal son comes home. Mr. Playboy is ready for the hammer to fall. He knows what he deserves. What does his father do? He throws a no expenses barred welcome home party for his son. Excess!

A rich man gives three servants money to invest. It's not a little cream off the top. He gives them all his assets-everything he's got and tells them to make more with it. When he comes home to settle accounts he doesn't reward those who made a profit by just giving them a perentage. "Go ahead, take it," he says. "You mean the interests?" they ask. "No, I don't mean the interest. I mean the interest AND the principle." Excess!

Love, care, compassion, creativity, and courage-the more we use, the more there is to draw from.

Do you remember Leo Buscaglia, the love professor who was so popular a while back? He was on a late night flight from Chicago to Los Angeles. There was a full crew and just two passengers. Buscaglia had been in Wisconsin leading a weekend retreat for some nuns. The fall colors were at their peak, and the beauty enthralled him. Every time he complimented something, the nuns would give it to him. At his feet were a large bag with a big

pumpkin, four loaves of sour dough bread, and a Wisconsin essential-six pounds of cheddar cheese.

After the complimentary drinks were offered, the lights dimmed. Thinking about the weekend and the moment at hand, he got an idea. He flipped up the arms separating the tree seats, spread out the leaves, and placed the pumpkin in the center. He arranged the bread and cheese wedges upon it, and then pushed the stewardess button.

A weary looking stewardess came down the aisle to check on him. When she arrived he made a gesture with his hand and said, "Taaah-Daaah!" She smiled, and said, "I'll be right back." She spoke to the other passenger and the rest of the flight crew, and then returned with two bottles of Champaign and crystal glasses. Afterwards he said, "It was the shortest flight I ever had."

Just a few tired people in a big jet streaking across the night sky. Just some fall leaves, bread, and cheese. It is blessed, broken, and given, and something wonderful happens.

Matthew is telling us about our condition and how Jesus responds to it. We talk so much these days about scarcity-oil, jobs, civility, safety, clean air, church attendance, and money to meet the budget. We survey the situation with our limited vision and fret and sweat, afraid of not having enough. But Jesus is the Lord of abundance. When we offer what little we have, he adds all that he has, and find that in the process that we not only have enough-we have more than enough with baskets left over.

Let's now read in unison the quote by Michael Foss at the top of your bulletin:

The world sees crises and all the reasons they can't be overcome. A theology of Scarcity buys into this destructive perspective. We focus on the problem rather than the Problem Solver we worship. God can take the meager supplies of our lives and turn them into abundance. What if, having tested our vision against the truth of God's World

and the best thinking of the discipleship community, we acted in the confidence of God's abundance?