

Sermon Title: **“Five Loaves and Two Fish”**

Bible: **John 6:1-21**

When: on the 10th Sunday after Pentecost, July 28, 2024

Where: about 25 people (plus YouTube Live Streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

O Lord, let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. Jesus Fed the Five Thousand!

The first part of today’s Scripture Reading from the Gospel of John is about Jesus’ feeding a large number of people. It is a miracle, right? This is the only miracle of Jesus written about in all four Gospels, even though there are slight differences. How many people were present? In the Gospel of Matthew, it was described as being about five thousand men besides women and children, but according to the Gospel of John, it was five thousand in all. With what food did Jesus feed the five thousand? Jesus used five loaves of bread and two fish. Were there any leftovers? There were twelve baskets of leftovers, even after the five thousand were satisfied. Jesus fed the five thousand with just five loaves of bread and two fish. And besides that, there were even twelve baskets of leftovers. This is a miracle, right? Because it is a miracle of Jesus, I believe that is why it was written about in all four Gospels. And can you personally believe this miracle?

2. Was It Possible?

Can you believe this miracle? How was it possible? Was it a literal miracle of feeding the five thousand? There have been many attempts to rationalize this miracle. One idea is that everyone who had food must have shared it. Many many people followed Jesus. These people must have brought along food for themselves, like packing a lunch box. Some people had their lunch boxes, and some people might have forgotten to bring their food. But when Jesus prayed over five loaves and two fish, all the people decided to share what they had with others, even with those who had nothing. So, when they shared, all the people could be satisfied, and they could even collect leftovers. This was how this miracle happened. Does this idea make sense?

How about this? The feeding did not mean physical bread and fish. It was not physical food, but spiritual food. Everyone was able to be fed with spiritual food. That's why the five thousand could be satisfied. How does this sound to you? Does this make sense?

Some people try to understand this story as a symbolic prefiguring of Holy Communion. Jesus took bread, and gave thanks, and distributed it. Is this familiar to us, like Holy Communion? The word "Give thanks" here in Greek is related to the term "Eucharist," which literally means thanksgiving, and this is one of the names for Holy Communion. Does this idea make sense to you?

One fun idea that I heard was a magic trick. In this idea, Jesus and his disciples had already bought a lot of bread and fish and stored them in a secret cave. Jesus prayed in front of the hidden entrance to the secret cave. Then, the disciples could distribute the bread and fish

behind the scenes, like magic. How does this idea sound to you? Is this too much to believe or does it sound too funny to you?

3. Co-Work

Which idea makes the most sense to you? Some ideas are reasonable, and some are philosophical or idealistic, and some are not that believable. And my focus on this story is how we work together with our Lord, Jesus Christ. When God created heaven and earth, God did it by Godself. When God provided manna and quail in the wilderness, God did it by Godself. However, here in this passage, Jesus used five loaves and two fish to feed the five thousand. Jesus did not do it by himself! Jesus uses what we have in order to perform God's miracle. Five loaves and two fish can look small. But in God's eyes, to give what we have demonstrates our faith and trust in God's miracle. When we give our little time, our little energy, our little prayers, our little presence, and our little gift, God will work with us. This is a mystery of God's co-working with us, even with the little that we have. And it is a miracle, because we can work with God.

4. 2024 School of Congregational Development

We are a small church. I heard from the circuit leaders' meeting that about 70% of the churches in our California-Nevada Annual Conference are small churches. I am a pastor who serves two small churches. And I see more pastors who serve more than one local church. And I know a pastor who serves three small churches. Starting September 1st, four bishops in the United States even plan to serve two annual conferences, which will be the first time in

our church history, for a bishop to serve two annual conferences. As you see, we cannot deny this sad or somewhat new trend. Small churches might need to share their pastors, and more pastors need to serve more than one local church. It seems like the disciples' situation in the second part of today's reading. They wanted to row the boat, but they could not go because of a strong wind. But when they saw Jesus' other miracle, walking on the sea, they arrived on land.

I believe that every church wants to have a full-time pastor who is not shared. For three years, you have shared your pastor with another church, and I have served two small churches. Thankfully, both churches understand each other's church situation and support this shared pastor. And I am thinking about our small churches. What more can I bring, even if it is only a little, just like a boy who brought five loaves of bread and two fish to Jesus?

From this Saturday, August 3rd to next Wednesday, August 7th, I plan to attend the 2024 School of Congregational Development near Chicago. Please pray for me and for our churches. What kind of congregational development do you expect? The school provides many small group workshops as well as main workshops each day. They offer 15 or 16 small group workshops each day, and I can choose only one. Since space is limited, there is a possibility I might not get the class I choose. I am still discerning. If you were me, the pastor of this church, which small group workshop would you choose? You can choose only one! For example, this is the list of 15 Monday small group workshops: 1. Dare to Shift - Challenging Leaders to SEE, CREATE, and DISCIPLE in a New Way 2. Courageous Church

3. Let's Get It Started 4. Expresiones de Amor: Fresh Expressions 5. Intentional Discipleship Systems and Community Engagement 6. Equipping Leaders To SEE, CREATE, and GO MAKE DISCIPLES in a Relevant & Transformative Way 7. Casting & Living into a God-Given Vision 8. Becoming a Listening Church 9. Worship & Disability: Anti-Ableist Practices for the Body of Christ 10. The Futuring Church: Believing Into Tomorrow Today 11. A Theological Framework for Trauma & Resilience 12. Digital Ministry for Everyone 13. Integrated Discipleship: Honoring Faith, Feelings, and Actions 14. Hopeful Together: Reimagining Cooperative Ministry Partnerships 15. Lay Leadership & Vocational Imagination. My choice method is to remove. I removed many, but I still have three options and I can choose only one: 8. Becoming a Listening Church 10. The Futuring Church: Believing Into Tomorrow Today 14. Hopeful Together: Reimagining Cooperative Ministry Partnerships. To choose only one topic each day is not easy. These five days are short, but I pray that what I choose and learn will be helpful and practical for our churches. Please pray for me and our churches.

What do you have? Even if it looks small and unimpressive, please bring it to Jesus. Then, God will give thanks and distribute it. God will use it. That's how God works with us. That's how God performs a miracle. God is waiting for us, because God wants to work with us!

What do you have to offer?

Closing Prayer

Loving and living God, we are small. We have a little. But just like a boy who brought five

loaves of bread and two fish, we want to bring what we have to you. O Lord, please use what we have, even if it seems like a small amount. Please feed us and more people in our community until we are satisfied! We want to work with you and witness your miracle. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.