

2 Kings 4:42-44

42 A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing the man of God some bread from the early produce—twenty loaves of barley bread and fresh grain from his bag. Elisha said, "Give it to the people so they can eat." 43 His servant said, "How can I feed one hundred men with this?" Elisha said, "Give it to the people so they can eat! This is what the LORD says: 'Eat and there will be leftovers.'" 44 So the servant gave the food to them. They ate and had leftovers, in agreement with the LORD's word.

Psalms 145:10-18

10 All that you have made gives thanks to you, LORD; all your faithful ones bless you! 11 They speak of the glory of your kingdom; they talk all about your power, 12 to inform all human beings about God's power and the majestic glory of God's kingdom. 13 Your kingdom is a kingship that lasts forever; your rule endures for all generations. The LORD is trustworthy in all that he says, faithful in all that he does. 14 The LORD supports all who fall down, straightens up all who are bent low. 15 All eyes look to you, hoping, and you give them their food right on time, 16 opening your hand and satisfying the desire of every living thing. 17 The LORD is righteous in all his ways, faithful in all his deeds. 18 The LORD is close to everyone who calls out to him, to all who call out to him sincerely.

Ephesians 3:14-21

14 This is why I kneel before the Father. 15 Every ethnic group (family) in heaven or on earth is recognized by him. 16 I ask that he will strengthen you in your inner selves from the riches of his glory through the Spirit. 17 I ask that Christ will live in your hearts through faith. As a result of having strong roots in love, 18 I ask that you'll have the power to grasp love's width and length, height and depth, together with all believers. 19 I ask that you'll know the love of Christ that is beyond knowledge so that you will be filled entirely with the fullness of God. 20 Glory to God, who is able to do far beyond all that we could ask or imagine by his power at work within us; 21 glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus for all generations, forever and always. Amen.

John 6:1-21

1 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. 14 When the people saw that he had done a miraculous sign, they said, "This is truly the prophet who is coming into the world." 15 Jesus understood that they were about to come and force him to be their king, so he took refuge again, alone on a mountain. 16 When evening came, Jesus' disciples went down to the lake.

17 They got into a boat and were crossing the lake to Capernaum. It was already getting dark and Jesus hadn't come to them yet. 18 The water was getting rough because a strong wind was blowing. 19 When the wind had driven them out for about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the water. He was approaching the boat and they were afraid. 20 He said to them, "I Am. Don't be afraid." 21 Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and just then the boat reached the land where they had been heading.

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

We live in a disposable culture. Not that the culture is disposable, but rather, it seems everything can be thrown away, that everything that's extra, leftover, dirty, or unwanted can be just tossed into a landfill. And yet Jesus tells us to "Gather the leftover pieces, so that nothing will be wasted." Gather the leftover pieces so that nothing will be wasted.

How strange does that sound to a people who trade in cell phones, computers, and cars every few years? As Americans, we represent 5% of the world's population, and yet somehow we account for 30% of the world's garbage. See what I mean by a

disposable culture?! Broken down for population, that's one million pounds per person, per year. And yet Jesus tells us to "Gather the leftover pieces, so that nothing will be wasted."

Food waste is a particular concern. 30%-40% of the food supply in the U.S. is thrown away. That accounts for twenty pounds of food per person, per month. In terms of dollars, that \$161.6 billion dollars worth of food over a year. In terms of persons, by far the most important category, that food could have fed over 530,000 people during that same time! And yet, Jesus tells us to "Gather the leftover pieces, so that nothing will be wasted."

But is this the wrong focus? These stories from 2 Kings and The Gospel of John story are about God's

miracle, right? Of course they are. In each story, the people of God doubt that such a little amount of food could feed such a great number of people and meet such a significant need. Yet, out of a deep desire to not just sustain life, but to help life to thrive, God works with our miniscule offerings to feed all those who hunger.

Sometimes, though, stories can be about more than one thing. These stories are about God's miracles. But what inspired the miracle? What brought God to such radical action on behalf of the hungry? Far more than just a propensity for snack time. Within God our Creator is a deep desire for human flourishing, an insatiable yearning for life. A deep desire that all people might be fed, be

clothed, have homes, be safe. A deep desire that no one might go hungry, deep desire that no one should be alone.

Because, you see, food is about relationship.

Food binds us together. Think of the food chains we learned about in grade school. The sun, the water, and the soil feed plants, which help to feed animals.

Animals feed other animals, and through waste and death, these return to the soil and the atmosphere, once again feeding plants and tying the cycle

together. We're tied together in this food chain relationship. There's also a food chain in our society.

Plants still draw on the sun, water, and soil. They still feed animals. And then we feed on those plants and animals. They come through grocery stores and

restaurants, through farms and our own gardens. Butchers and dairies and bakeries and produce stands. We rely on one another to feed one another. And there's extra at every step of this food chain. And we should hear ringing in our ears Jesus' command to "Gather the leftover pieces, so that nothing will be wasted."

So, here's the kicker. Every time we trash edible food, we break this chain. in other words, we shatter relationships. When we dispose of good food, we dispose of the networks of life. That may seem too simplistic, but what's the alternative? When Jesus sees hungry people, rather than despair at the hunger he sees, he turns the tiny offerings into heaven's banquet. At the potential for division, for

the broken food chain, Jesus instead steps in and binds the chain together with his own miraculous body. So our disposal of abundance, rather than create relationship, instead breaks community.

Think about it this way. The feeding of the 5000 is the only miracle, the only one, to appear in all four Gospels. Jesus' birth only appears in two! The earliest manuscripts of Mark don't mention resurrection appearances of Jesus! And yet each Gospel writer found this story important enough to include. Why is that? Because these stories don't just show us the magical power of miracles, though God's power over creation surely is a part of the story. More so, however, it is important for us to see how God uses that power in miracles, because miracles show us

God's deepest desires for the world's wholeness.

What this story tells us is that, in God's kingdom, there is food enough for all. Food is about relationships because it signals this promised future when we'll all be fed at the table of Jesus, together. In the present, then, we're called not only to trust in the miracles of Jesus past and the future where all will be fed. God calls us to draw upon the witness of the miracles and work toward the future by feeding people in the here and now.

We're already at work in this through partnering with Beans and Rice in our community, and that is a wonderful start. But let's use our imaginations to consider what other ways we might renounce our

disposable culture and instead work to develop relationships where all are fed. How might we do this?

What if we developed a new ministry here at CLC with a weekly meal, one prepared by members and friends of the church, but that was free to all comers? We could, of course, offer open donations for the cost of food, but make it clear that the purpose of the meal was to feed any and all who needed it. In this simple gesture, we could signal the good news that God desires all people to be fed.

What if we used some of the space out in front of the church and back on the alley to build raised boxes for a community garden? We could develop a sustainable urban farming program to help teach students walking home from school about simple

practices of growing your own food. We could then use that food for these community meals as well as supplement Beans and Rice and Micah's Backpack with the extra.

What if we developed, along with our campus ministry students to join the Campus Kitchens Project. This organization helps to rescue good food from the garbage at schools across the country and redirect it to feed those who face food scarcity. This would require us to partner with other student groups and community organizations, but think of the hundreds of pounds of food that we could save every day at RU that can go to feed people in need within our community?

What if we changed our purchasing and cooking habits? What if we refused to buy more food than we can use or cook more food than we will eat? And when we have extra, rather than throwing it away, what if we found ways to redirect the good toward those in need, whether through our feeding partners or through developing deeper relationships with our neighbors. Imagine a once a month neighborhood potluck built to empty the pantry and help sustain those who live around you who might be having a hard time of it. You can start something like that right now!

In each of these simple gestures, we can signal the good news that God desires all people to be fed. Two thousand years ago, the miracle was that God

took not enough food and made it more than enough for those in need. Today the miracle we need is a rebirth of creativity, compassion, and commitment in our own lives to channel the massive amounts of excess food to those who need it most. The miracle we need is for God to transform our abundance into the Kingdom's presence. We need to inhabit the imagination of Jesus that refuses to see problems, who offers himself in the face of insufficiency to ensure there is always enough.

If we do this, we not only end up in service to the world. We create bonds with others. We develop connections with all sorts of people who bear a different stamp of God's image. We live the reality

that food is about relationship to one another, to
God, and to God's Kingdom.

Now that's the kind of miracle I want to be a part
of. Amen? Amen.