



Devotionals ~ 3-9 September 2023

Read: John 6:1-15

Fifth Ave. Family & Friends, — Hi! I know you're there. I know there are a lot of you. You haven't been back to church since, oh, months, years, decades? Maybe you've watched every online service or not even one, or somewhere in between. No matter what, I want you to know I see you. I want you to know that I truly get how hard this stage of your faith life is.

How deciding to come back to church inside of the building on a Sunday at a specific time and in person, or not, feels a lot more complicated than you ever anticipated it would be almost three years ago. I know how some of our pre and post pandemic life felt like a reset — a new beginning — and in that time you were able to look at the parts of your life and reevaluate anything that felt like a "had to." I get that when you really thought about it, church was one of those questionable "had to" things.

Maybe you weren't sure why you were going to church, or if it was something you even wanted to do in the first place, but week after week you found yourself getting to church on Sunday morning. And then you discovered that not going felt better than going on most Sundays. ***You discovered a love of easy Sundays without getting ready or leaving your house.***

You learned that a slow and steady walk in an area near your house felt more like church than trying to wrangle children, a resistant spouse or family member or your own attention through a sermon. So, you haven't come back. And there might not even be a "yet" on the end of that sentence.

You haven't come back, and I know that you might not ever come back. If that's you, I hope you'll hear and trust my next words to you: Choosing to not attend in-person church, or attend any church at all, doesn't mean you don't believe in God, or that your faith is somehow lacking. It's just not true, even if you've been told it is by someone else.

I know there are a lot of reasons you may have decided to stay away, and I hope you hear me when I say that every one of them is valid. I get that maybe you aren't sure what you believe anymore, but whatever it is certainly doesn't look like what it used to look like, and you know you won't find it going back to the way things were.

I get that you still don't want to come back yet and that it feels like the church is moving on without you; that you're being left behind and left out. Valid. All of this is valid.

And I get it. I get all of it because I feel it too. I too, feel anxious. I know, I know, pastors aren't supposed to feel this way. Or if we do, we certainly aren't supposed to say it out loud. We're supposed to model faith without fear and confident leadership in the face of unprecedented challenges. But I can't. I feel all the things you're feeling too.

And I want you to know that you are not alone. I want you to know you're not the only one feeling this way. And more than anything, I want you to know that I believe that church is more than a building. I meant it when I told you the church was the people, the relationships, the wondering together about the goodness and love of God and faith and life.

Therefore, God has always and will continue to meet you where you are. We invite you to come and fellowship with us. However, getting people to return to the church building is eternally less important than helping them stay close to Jesus.

As your Pastor, my prayer and hope is to help them get closer to Jesus, whether-or-not they show up in person; know I'm

serving you, not myself.

So, what can in-person worship offer that online just can't?

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- The personal touch
- Times of fellowship and conversation
- Deepening relationships
- The feeling of in-room worship as we sing together.
- Participating together in the Holy Communion (Lord's Supper)
- And so much more. Amen.

For this week's devotionals, I would like to speak of those of us who have only talents equal to five loaves and two fishes to offer the Savior to help feed the multitudes.

Someone in the Old Testament had multiplied loaves. Elisha was the successor of Elijah, the greatest of all the prophets. Elijah had multiplied flour and oil to save a widow and her son from starvation. Elisha did a bit better than his master, multiplying 20 loaves to feed 100, with some even left over. But in the Gospel, Jesus multiplies 5 loaves and feeds 5,000, leaving 12 baskets left over. We're talking serious one-upmanship here!

The multiplication of the loaves and fishes is the only miracle of Jesus recorded in all four gospels. John calls it a sign, a symbolic event with many hidden meanings. It points beyond itself back to Old Testament persons and events and forward to the Eucharist.

The Gospel of John is a wonderful, exciting chapter whereby Jesus performed one of His most public and significant miracles so that the people, especially His disciples, can come to a fuller, richer understanding of who He is and what He wants to do for our lives.

The famous miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes calls us to trust that when we offer the Lord our ordinary and scanty resources, He will work a wonder of transformation, just like He transforms the bread and wine (grape juice) of Holy Communion (Lord's Supper).

In John 6:1-15, we find Jesus and his disciples watching a crowd that had been following Jesus come toward them. Jesus asks his disciple, Philip, where he thought they could buy bread for the crowd, for the crowd had not eaten in a while. Philip stated the impossibility of them providing everyone bread.

But the disciples found a boy with five loaves of bread and two fish, his meal. The boy gives up his food to the disciples and Jesus. Jesus then takes the meal, blesses it, and begins to break it into pieces. The breaking did not cease. It kept multiplying until everyone in the crowd was full. And even then, there were twelve baskets full of leftovers.

Can you relate to the boy with five loaves and two fish? You feel that your resources are so little and wonder what God could ever do with them. Don't get discouraged. Keep your hands open.

The world is full of broken things - broken bones, broken windows, little birds with broken wings, not to mention broken hearts and broken homes. The Bible also refers to broken things:

1. A BROKEN BANQUET - Matthew 15:36 - "he took the seven loaves and the fish, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds".
2. A BROKEN BUILDING - Mark 2:4 - And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay.
3. A BROKEN BOX - Mark 14:3 - While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head.
4. A BROKEN BODY - 1 Corinthians 11:24 - and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Jesus did not cut the bread. He broke it. He was painting a picture of what was about to happen to His body. It would be violently wounded. It would be torn and mutilated. Tearing is worse than cutting.

As the boy handed his meal to the disciples and Jesus, he likely wondered what difference such a small amount of food could make among the large crowd. It would not be surprising if the boy assumed he and his meal would be turned away, asked to return to his friend or family. His meal was small, and the need was so great.

But then, Jesus took hold of the food and began to break it into pieces. The small meal turned into a feast that was more than enough to fill the stomachs of the crowd. He takes that which is insufficient and uses it to accomplish His purpose. He took an elderly, childless couple and made a people more numerous than the stars. He used a small group of people in a house to start His global church. Our God can take whatever is given in faith and multiply its impact in unfathomable ways for God's mission. God is about multiplication. The boy learned this on that day.

Why would we release the possessions we hold? Trust. Giving and holding possessions loosely requires trust. Trust that God will use the resources for his purposes; trust that God will care for our needs. The boy with the meal saw the few fish and loaves he once held multiply in a miraculous way. In Jesus's hands the small meal became great. But it took an act of trust to get the meal into Jesus's hands. Multiplication often requires trust. The boy learned this on that day.

The boy made a great sacrifice. The boy went from comfortable, having sustenance, to uncomfortable, having no sustenance. That is how sacrifice works. Sacrifice drives out comfort. Sacrifice is uncomfortable. But sacrificial giving is what we find celebrated in Scripture. God blessed Abraham because he was willing to sacrifice his son. Jesus pointed out the Widow with two coins because she gave all she had. Biblical giving is sacrificial. And God uses the sacrifice to shape the giver's heart and advance God's Kingdom. Multiplication often requires sacrifice. The boy learned this on that day.

The boy handed over his meal. This was certainly an act of trust and sacrifice. But the boy did not feed the five thousand. Nor did the disciples feed the five thousand. The boy and the disciples were simply participants. The people were fed by Jesus. Stomachs were full because an act of God took place. Apart from this act, the people would have remained hungry. The boy's act allowed him to participate in God's work.

The same is true for us. God wants us to trust God with our possessions and work to advance God's Kingdom. But ultimately, it is not our possessions or work that will cause the multiplication. We give and work, knowing that it is God who is in control, and it is God's handiwork that causes multiplication. While we eagerly participate in God's mission; Jesus breaks, bless, and multiplies the bread and fish. Multiplication is a result of God's mighty miraculous work, not our work. The boy learned this on that day.

The boy with two fish and five loaves learned a lot that day. He learned God is in control, and that God is about multiplication. He learns that multiplication often starts with an act of trust and sacrifice. And he learned that while we certainly get to participate, it is ultimately God who brings about the multiplication.

Friends let's be sure to listen to God. And let's bring to Jesus what small or big things we have (nothing is too small) because doing so, we will surely change the world. We each has our five loaves and two fish. Each of us is a loaf and a fish. But in the hands of God, we can be a miracle.

PRAYING TO OUR HEAVENLY FATHER —

YOU'RE NOT ALONE, LET US PRAY WITH YOU & FOR YOU

PRAYERS WILL BE ANSWERED

- **Mr. Robert (Bob) Kuhaupt** tripped and fell at an outdoor event resulting in head and back injury. He is in admitted at HSHS St. Vincent Hospital, Green Bay, WI. Loving Father, touch Mr. Bob now with your healing hands, for we believe that your will is for him to be well in mind, body, soul and spirit. Cover Mr. Bob with the most precious blood of your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ from the top of his head to the soles of my feet. Heal him, dear LORD. Amen. Please send your prayers of healing and support to: **Mr. Robert (Bob) and Ms. Joy Kuhaupt, Sussex Mills Apts, W240 N6345 Maple Ave. #116, Sussex, WI 53089.**
- **Ms. Nancy Whitson'** husband, **Robert**, passed away on 30 July 2023. We extend our deepest and heartfelt condolences to Ms. Nancy and her family. She is still admitted at The Pavilion at Glacier Valley. She requests your prayers and support as she continues to journey with health concerns. Please send cards and notes of encouragement to: **Mrs. Nancy Whitson, 922 Hickory Street, West Bend, WI 53095.**
- **Mr. Tom Damp** has been comfortable and safe in his home for years. This has been possible primarily due to home healthcare services. However, with significant changes in coverage from health insurance, availability of in-home health care personnel, and other life circumstances, Mr. Tom is having to make unexpected decisions; stay in his home or

transition to assisted living. He asks for your prayers and care as God reveals, God's plan for his new season. Caring Father, we thank you for the opportunity we have as a church family to pray and care for Mr. Tom Damp. We ask that you bless him with the resources to keep safe from harm. Please surround this whole process with your wisdom and mercy, Lord. We pray for Mr. Tom's health and care in this whole process. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen. Card and noted can be mailed to: **Mr. Tom Damp, 1707 Sunset Ridge Drive, West Bend WI 53095.**

- No one enters this life a follower of Christ. If we are God's children, it is because we were born spiritually sometime after we were born physically. God uses our prayers as one of the means of drawing people, including our grandchildren, to God. We lift up prayers of healing and strength for **Mr. Ben Barth**, fiancé of Ms. Heather Wolf, granddaughter of Mr. Roger and Mrs. Mary Rogge. Mr. Ben has been given a new heart and new lungs but is experiencing kidney concerns. Cards of prayers for healing and restoration can be mailed to: **Mr. Ben Barth, 969 Tuscola Lane, West Bend, WI 53095.**
- We remain in prayer and support for **Mrs. Ann Cording**. Great Physician, you can heal us in a heartbeat. We pray for God's miraculous healing today. Take our pain away, according to Your will, in Your time. We're not promised a painless life on this earth, but You do want us to live a happy one. Send Your Spirit to help us see past our circumstances and onto Your calling on our lives. Sickness and injury can't stop God-placed dreams. Fill our hearts with hope as we wait on You to move in our lives and flow out from our hearts. In Jesus' Name, Amen. Cards and notes of love and care can be mailed to: **Mrs. Ann Cording, 1416 S. Silverbrook Drive, West Bend WI 53095.**
- Our deepest sympathies are extended to **Mrs. Shari Weiss**, sister of Mrs. Kathy Schneider, on the passing of her husband, Mr. Mike Weiss. Mr. Mike struggled for a long time with health concerns; eternal rest grant unto Mr. Mike, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace. Amen. Cards and notes of condolences and sympathies can be mailed to: **Mrs. Shari Weiss, c/o Mrs. Kathy Schneider, 2107 Maple Dale Drive, West Bend, WI 53090.**
- **Bro. Bob Krell** is rooted in our hearts as we shower him and the Family with our love, care, and support. He is grateful and humbled for your prayers and cards of restoration, strength, and miraculous healing. Thank you, God, for hearing and answering our prayer. Cards and notes of love and encouragement can be mailed to: **Bro. Bob and Mrs. Jean Krell, 804 Lenora Drive, West Bend, WI 53090.**
- **Ms. Sandy Wamser** having been diagnosed with Epilepsy, is still working with her medical team to find the correct medications and doses to control the seizures. She is very grateful for your love, prayers, and support. Special prayers for Mr. Pat as he cares for Ms. Sandy. Cards and notes can be sent to: **Mr. Pat and Mrs. Sandy Wamser, 3742 Pleasant Valley Road, West Bend, WI 53095.**
- **Mr. Don Walters** is still experiencing several medical challenges. We're keeping Ms. Joyce in our thoughts and prayers as well. Letters and notes of encouragement and love can be mailed to: **Mr. Don and Mrs. Joyce Walters, 5368 Woodlawn Summit, West Bend, WI 53095.**
- **Mr. Chuck Rogge** is still on a journey of healing. He is grateful for the cards and notes of support. Please continue to flood the mailbox with love and support to: **Mr. Chuck and Mrs. Sue Rogge, 5011 Hwy. P, West Bend, WI 53095.**
- **Mrs. Janice Liepert-Kempf**, appreciates your continued prayers for healing and strength as she continues to struggle with illness. You can send emails of prayers and support to: alankempf33@gmail.com; or cards and notes to **Mr. Allan and Mrs. Janice Liepert-Kempf, 414B. South Pleasantview Road, Plymouth, WI 53073; phone number: 920.838.1830.**

We continue to celebrate our 175th year of service, commitment and Methodism in West Bend, Wisconsin.

“Honoring Our Past, Celebrating Our Present, Anticipating Our Future”

Prayer: Loving God, we come before You grateful and thankful that another church year is upon us, another year filled with opportunities to strengthen and build up Your Church through our ministry for The Beloved Community. You are a good God and have a perfect plan for us this fruitful 175th anniversary year. You rule over all things. You know all things. You know the hearts of all your people. Above all, may we glorify You in all our ministry goals and plans for this year. May all that we do as a ministry shine a light in this dark world, so that the world might know who You are and what You have done for us in Christ. We thank You for the privilege to serve You and Your Church. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Amazing grace will see us through, Pastor Clarissa & Bro. Martin