

“Living Well” Devotionals

Matthew 14:13-21, the Gospel for August 2, 2020

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

This beloved story of the feeding of the 5,000 stands out in the Bible because it's the only miracle of Jesus that appears in all four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

That's a tipoff that something huge is happening here. It's a Bible passage that almost yells at us: **“Hey, you—pay attention! Don't miss what's happening here!”**

And what is happening here, anyway?

Some pretty weird arithmetic, I'd say...because on the surface of it, this text seems to point to a math formula that reads: $5 + 2 = 5,000$

FIVE loaves of bread plus TWO fish equals enough food to feed more than 5,000 persons!!

Say what?

$5 + 2 = \text{FIVE THOUSAND}???$ In what universe does **that** add up? None that I can think of...

....but what if there's something's missing from this math formula? What if it should read like this: $5 + 2 + \underline{1} = 5,000?$

Five loaves, plus two fish, **plus one Jesus** = dinner for 5,000 men “*besides women and children*” as Matthew reminds us!

Astounding—and yet there’s something a little familiar about it!

There’s an echo in the room...an echo of those parables of “smallness” we’ve been hearing this summer.

God takes a tiny seed, a pinch of yeast, and a little boy’s measly shore lunch...and accomplishes amazing things with them.

Small is beautiful in God’s way of looking at things.

And that’s great news for us in our Eastern North Dakota Synod, as we gear up for our all-digital synod assembly in just two short weeks.

Did you know that the 300 to 400 voting members who’ll “gather” via Zoom for our assembly will reflect less than ½ of 1% of all the ELCA folks on our territory?

No worries, though! God’s math is different from our math. Those 300-400 voting members **plus Jesus (!)** will call forth a bishop, embrace a fresh mission plan, and lead us into a host of new ways to serve, equip and challenge God’s people.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.