

People are hungry and they don't know how to get fed. So they do all kinds of things trying to satisfy their needs, which have nothing to do with physical hunger.

They drink alcohol. They take drugs. They eat too much. They fight with loved ones. They work too much. They gamble. They become bitter and the bitterness eats them up from the inside out. Living without joy, without hope, without Jesus, they're ravenous. They don't know how to quiet the hunger that gnaws at them. It's exhausting. They're exhausted. The people around them are exhausted, too.

In Mark 6:31-32, Jesus is already physically exhausted when he and the disciples learn that John the Baptist is dead. Weary and sad, they go to rest. You know the story. Jesus sees the multitudes following him. They're "like a sheep without a shepherd." He has compassion for them. He doesn't rest, but teaches them many things.

It's getting late in the day. The disciples tell Jesus to send the crowd away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something to eat. Isn't that like us? We recognize that someone needs help and we tell them all the great places they can go to get it. But sometimes we are called to do more than just point our fingers. We're called to help them. That doesn't mean we take a homeless person home to live with us, but it could mean that we buy them a meal.

Or a co-worker is unusually quiet. We might ask what's wrong and then take the time to really listen. Listen deeply with our hearts and pray that the Lord gives us helpful ways to minister to them. It's so easy to be cynical and to get into the habit of whining about our circumstances. Long ago friend Sue and I worked together under harsh conditions. One day we were whining together. I said, "I feel like all I do is whine." "This place makes everyone into whiners," said Sue. It's true. Everyone around us whined, too. At that moment we decided to stop whining. Our circumstances didn't change, but the people around us did. Our co-workers became our close friends. We only had our kindness, compassion, and our sense of humor to offer, but it made a difference.

The disciples want to send the multitudes away to buy food. But Jesus tells them, "You feed them." Say what? "You feed them." The disciples ask the boy and he gives up his lunch of five loaves of bread and the two small fish. What happens? Five thousand men plus women and children are fed that day. Everyone is part of the miracle. The little boy didn't have to do anything special, but to simply give what he already had. We, too, can share what the Lord has already given us. Maybe you have a smile that lights up a room. You can use that smile to light up someone's life. Many people are simply looking for acceptance.

What does your five loaves and two fish look like? What can you give that you already have? What will you give as an offering? If we follow Jesus, there are things we have to give up. Things that we are called to lay down at the cross and leave there. Cynicism. Hopelessness. Bitterness. Addictions. Anything that hinders our walk of faith.

I have left many things at the foot of the cross. I still do, every day. Not one of them do I want to take back. I've gained so much more. My five loaves and two fish have become a banquet hosted by my Lord. May we all feast at His table.

