



John 6:1-15
So That You May Believe: John
“More Than Enough”

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A few times in the course of raising our kids, they have offered to help cover part of the cost of a purchase that we either needed to make, or were at least considering. I can distinctly remember two or three different occasions when they were younger where one of my kids would say, “I can help pay for that.” And each time they’d offer pretty much whatever was in their piggy bank - \$30 or \$40 or something like that, for a purchase that was more like \$1,000 or more. And I don’t remember what the items under consideration were each time, but I do remember our response: “That’s kind of you, and we appreciate the offer, but it’s not necessary. You keep saving your money.” I don’t know, maybe as Steve Miller once sang, I should “go on, take the money, and run.” But it just didn’t seem quite right for them to be paying for whatever it was we were considering.

And as we continue our journey through the gospel according to John, today we come to one of the “signs” that Jesus gives (John identifies seven total) that all four gospel writers include (though the others don’t label it as a “sign). As you would expect when four authors report on an event, some of the details are different. But there’s plenty enough overlap to conclude that all four gospel writers share this event. John’s account of this is arguably the most well-known because of the presence of a little boy who has the courage and faith to offer to Jesus the seed of a solution to a problem that they were all facing together. And, unlike us with our kids, Jesus receives the offering and does something amazing with it – much more so than me taking my kids’ \$40 so I can buy lumber for a deck, or whatever may have been under consideration. So, let’s turn to John 6 and look at the first 15 verses this morning. This is God’s Word to you and me today (**John 6:1-15**).

So, Jesus and his disciples cross the Sea of Galilee to the other side. In the other gospel accounts, they specifically say that **Jesus left from one side to the other to get away from the crowds. But the crowds show up, anyway.** Gwen and I have been fortunate enough to go to Hawaii three times in our 25 years of marriage: once for our honeymoon, a second time just 9 months later when we returned back to the U.S. after living in South Korea for a few

months and we were able to extend a lay-over for 2 or 3 days. And then we didn't make it back again until near the end of the summer of 2019, for a 22nd anniversary trip for a few days, and we stayed in Honolulu/Waikiki.

One morning we decided to go to Diamond Head, as we'd never been there. We took a city bus, which dropped us off near the entrance to the park, and we walked in. We knew we would experience great views from the top and were prepared for that. What we really had not totally prepared for were the throngs of people. I don't think we expected it to be as sparse as, say, the top of Mount Rainier...but I thought it might be more like hiking up Tiger Mountain or Mt. Si, even on a beautiful summer Saturday, like we used to have. But no, it was more like Disneyland on the 4th of July. It was nearly a constant stream of people going up, and going down.

Jesus experienced that here. There's just no getting away from the crowds of people – even on the other side of the lake. So, Jesus and his disciples go part way up a hillside, and the people follow. Jesus turns to Phillip – who was from this region (John 1:43), so he'd know where the nearest McDonald's or Chick-Fillet was – and Jesus asked him, “Where's the nearest place to get some food for these people?” Now, John tells us that Jesus already knew how he was going to handle this situation, and that he's just testing Philip. Perhaps Jesus is getting a sense of where Philip's head and heart are when it comes to ministering to these people, or where he is in regards to Jesus himself.

And Philip gives an answer that's along the lines of what probably a lot of us would have given in that moment. (Without the benefit of Jesus' resurrection, for example.) We'd like to think that we would pass this test with flying colors, but I think if we're honest, we'll realize that we are frequently not that different than him. Philip says, **“It would take more than half a year's wages to get enough bread to feed these people even a bite” (6:7)**. It's an answer that only sees obstacles and problems and logistical challenges.

Too frequently – especially in the church – we just see problems and obstacles that seem insurmountable. We can figure out how to ship almost anything to almost any corner of the world in 2 days; we can build buildings that stretch high into the sky; we can teach little kids how to read, write, and

do arithmetic (no small miracle for a teacher with 30 kids in a room!); We can put panels on our roofs to convert the sun's light into electricity...I mean, the obstacles that we have overcome throughout history are pretty amazing. We have all been a part of some significant obstacle-conquering things in our lives – in our places of work, our homes, and so forth.

And yet sometimes in our faith, we sense God inviting us, calling us, even commanding us, to do something, and we see it in the same way the Mariners see the possibility of getting into the play-offs: It's practically impossible. “God, you want me to do what? That'll take so much time! That'll take so much energy! That'll take so much money! I can't do that.” We frequently respond this way (maybe not so directly, but the end result is the same) whether we're talking about big-picture “what's the purpose of the church” kinds of things, church budgets, serving in a ministry area once a month, or saying “hello” to someone we haven't met before. We have a way of focusing on the obstacles.

I'm sure I've used this illustration before, but when you're snow-skiing – and most of you know I love skiing – when you're skiing, one of the places that's fun to ski is in the trees. Some groves of trees are too tightly packed, but many are spaced out enough you can ski through them. And when you're skiing in the trees, you don't want to look at the trees, because usually where you're looking is where you end up going. You want to see the trees and know that they're there...but then you look at the spaces in-between the trees, because that's where you want to go. That's the path through and around the obstacles, and that's the path you want to follow.

Similarly, Jesus has the plan laid out. For instance, in today's passage: He knew how he was going to resolve the problem. John tells us as much. He just needs his disciples to be willing to help out, and stay focused on Jesus. Stay focused on the path through the obstacles. But Philip only sees the obstacles. He's like a skier, staring at the trees.

Then, one of the other disciples, Andrew, enters into the conversation. A boy has come up to him, or he approached the boy, and it turns out this kid brought a sack lunch with him. You can just picture the boy holding open his

paper bag (I know they didn't have those...bear with me) and showing what he had inside. Andrew very tentatively suggests that maybe the solution lies in this boy's food...he's got five barley loaves (rolls) of bread and two small fish. But even Andrew doesn't seem to think it's very realistic, as he questions, "But how far will they go among so many people?" (6:9). So, he's got his doubts...but he and this boy stay focused on Jesus.

In fact, given Andrew's doubts about the feasibility of this food feeding the crowd, I suspect it was the boy's idea. You don't get the sense that Andrew said to the kid – "Hey, you've got some food! Would you like to meet Jesus? I'm sure that if we give your food to Jesus, he can make it feed everyone. There might even be some leftovers." You don't get that sense that that was the sales pitch to the kid. It seems to be the other way around. When Jesus talks later about having "faith like a child," besides just the children who were gathered around him when he said that, I wonder if this child was in the back of his mind. Anyway, the boy thinks it might be helpful...So, he, along with Andrew and his doubts, offers this little lunch to Jesus.

By the way, **John notes for us that it was five "barley" loaves.** It's easy to gloss over, but this detail about what kind of bread it was is actually a clue as to the socio-economic status of the boy and his family, and probably – at least by-and-large – the crowd that's gathered there as well. In their day, barley was not considered to be a very good grain. It was the grain of those who were poor. For instance, we can look at something that Philo of Alexandria wrote. Philo was a Greek Jew who ended up living in Alexandria in Egypt when it was part of the Roman Empire. He is often considered to be the founder of religious philosophy. And he writes, **"Barley is, in fact, a very questionable nourishment and is appropriate only for irrational animals and unfortunate humans"** (Philo of Alexandria, 1st Century). Now, today, Barley is seen to have a lot of benefits, but in their day, this was their view and understanding of barley. This boy, his family, and probably a significant part of this crowd, because this region was not exactly full of well-to-do folks...these folks don't have much to offer.

So, Jesus takes this boy's second-class lunch, gives thanks for this bit of food, and fed the multitude of people. It just "happens." No thunder,

lightning, or wind sweeping over them. It's subtle. 5,000 men, plus women and children. Probably somewhere in the range of 10,000 people. And then Jesus asks his disciples to gather the leftovers. Not only are they all fed, but there are leftovers, and Jesus says that none of it should go to waste – which in our American culture where we waste a lot, this is a good word for us to hear. And it must have been a bit of a surprise to them: Not only are the people getting fed, but there's leftovers! And they collect 12 baskets worth of food.

And then **John tells us that this was another “sign” that Jesus gave to indicate who he is.** We've seen a couple others – such as the man healed at the pool, the turning of water into wine. These are not some spiritual metaphor, but a sign. A sign communicates about, or points to, a reality. Road signs, for instance tell you the names of streets, or how far it is to a city, or tell you which way to go. They're not just symbolic or metaphorical – the streets and the cities they point to are real. Similarly, these are signs that point to the reality of who Jesus is. Some start wondering if he is a (the) prophet, a great leader like they'd had in previous generations. So, their expectation of Jesus is incomplete, but it gets close. Jesus senses that some of them want to make him king, but that's not his mission, so he slips away.

So, I think there are a couple things to take away from this passage. We've already touched on offering what we've got, and bringing it to Jesus even if we might be tempted to stare at the obstacles. What we offer may be a little, it may be a lot. Most of us in this region have a lot: ambition, drive, accomplishments, money, achievements, etc. Some of us don't. It doesn't really matter. **Jesus can take whatever you've got – a little time, a little money, a little food, a little energy, a little talent – and use it for his glory and to bless others.** The boy here is like the woman who puts a couple pennies into the offering at the Temple and Jesus says that she put in everything she had, and upholds her as being generous. The boy did the same thing here. It was, apparently, his whole lunch. All he had. Probably there was more back home...but that was all he had there, and it was for his tummy! The key is that he stays focused on Jesus. He doesn't stare at the obstacles...He had faith that Jesus could do something with what he had to

offer in spite of the challenge. Let's bring what we have and offer it to him as well, trusting in his plan.

And then: **Second of all, we can bring whatever we have and Jesus can use it, even if – like Andrew and Philip – we've got our doubts.** Their doubts didn't stop Jesus. Again...there doubts did not stop Jesus. Perfect faith is not required. Some of us have questions and doubts about who Jesus is. Even long-time Christians have them, let alone those whose doubts have kept them from following. Keep coming to him, even with those questions. Jesus can work with offering just a small amount of faith. He invites us to give of ourselves so he can work through what we have – because Jesus has a plan. Jesus has a plan to work in and through each of us...to work through you. He knows what he's doing. He's got you covered. And he can work with whatever you've got to offer him, even if it's not much, and even if it's under layers of doubts and questions.

Probably, most of us have more than a few loaves of bread and a couple fish to offer him. Whether it's financial wealth, or time and energy, the gifts and talents God has blessed us with...most of us have something to offer. The opportunities we have here at Rose Hill Church to minister to others is great. **Jesus can do it, and he's asking us to be a part of what it is he's doing.** He can work through us – through you – here at our church to shape disciples both young and old; he can work through us to minister to the poor in our community (as well as the rich, who are hard to reach because: who needs God when you've got everything?); he can work through us to bring comfort and compassion to those who are grieving or going through difficult seasons of life; He can work through us to befriend those who are lonely. He can work through us to bring others into the family of faith so they would know Jesus crucified and resurrected as their Lord and Savior.

Jesus can take what we have and use it for the benefit of people and for his glory. So, let's offer what we've got, whether it's a lot or a little. In His hands what we offer to him can go a whole lot further than we might ever imagine. Let's pray...Amen.