

Something to Eat
Mark 6:30-44
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When I was a kid in church youth group, I remember studying this story. I believe we were actually exploring Matthew's version of it, but the feeding of the 5,000 (men) is pretty similar in all four gospels. It is the only miracle of Jesus that appears in all four gospels. The early church loved this story of Jesus feeding a multitude and told it often.

As a kid, I loved putting my feet down in a bible story and walking around in it. I loved to wander in the story and wonder about it. I asked many a, "what if?", "why?", "well, what about...", and "how come...?" The first thing I noticed after reading this story in youth group was who was missing from the story: the women and children. How could there be a crowd of 5,000 men and not a single woman or child with them? Why would the writer leave out at least half of the crowd or even more likely the majority of the crowd?

My youth pastor, knowing me well and no doubt expecting that to be the first questions to leave my mouth, smiled to himself. And our youth group talked about how women and children were often left out of stories. Women and children were not meant to be seen or heard. And we talked about how Jesus time and again, centered women and children in his ministry. We talked about who we don't see included in our world today, and how we can bring more people in like Jesus did.

And then, my youth pastor posed a question to us that completely blew my thirteen or fourteen year old mind. He asked, "Do you think Jesus really multiplied the five loaves of bread and two fish? Or do you think that one person offered what they had, and upon seeing that more people began to share what they had?" I had never considered this before. Of course Jesus who had turned water to wine, healed the sick, and raised the dead had miraculously multiplied the food so everyone would have something to eat! That's the whole point of the story! But the more I thought about it, the more we discussed, I realized that sharing what you have is a miracle. When you live under empire, sharing what you have and rejecting scarcity is a miracle.

When I was younger, the idea of the miracle of sharing fascinated me and I thought about it often. Sometimes I still do, and I wish that we would embrace the truth that there is enough for each and every body. But I must confess to y'all, that I also sometimes now when I think about Jesus feeding the multitude, I become uninterested. Almost two decades later, I have heard the take that people decided to share what they had more times than I can count. And I confess that I sometimes make the mistake of thinking that this story doesn't really have anything new to reveal.

Maybe the miracle is people decided to share what they had. Maybe Jesus really did miraculously multiply five loaves of bread and two fish for the multitude to have something to

eat. We'll never know for sure what happened, and that's okay. Sometimes it's okay to embrace the mystery and know that something miraculous did happen—the hungry were fed. Embracing and living the way of Jesus is the way of abundance, is the way of enough for each and every body, and that is a beautiful and wonderful truth.

But, as I read and explored this story this week, I began to wonder about the stories around this story. How did Jesus and his disciples get to the point where they needed a deserted place all by themselves to rest a while? What had been going on?

Right before the story of Jesus feeding the multitude, Mark seemingly takes an interlude. In chapter 6 we read stories of Jesus being rejected in his hometown, Jesus healing the sick, Jesus calling the disciples and sending them out to teach, the disciples teaching, casting out demons, and curing the sick, we also hear the story of Jesus walking on water and calming the storm. We have all of these stories that flow together and makes sense together, but then right in the middle of these stories, Mark tells of the death of John the Baptist at the hands of Herod.

At first glance, it seems like these two stories: the death of John the Baptist and Jesus feeding the multitude have no connection. How could a story where a prophet is beheaded by a ruler and a miraculous multiplication of food for a hungry crowd have anything to do with each other?

John was Jesus' cousin. They were the same age. We don't get the stories of either of their childhoods: family dinners or reunions, cousin sleepovers, birthday parties, the games they played, the trouble they might have gotten into. But we do know they were family. We know that John was a prophet preparing the way for Jesus. We know that Jesus chose John to baptize him. We may not get to see the ins and out of their relationship, but there are few loves like the love between cousins.

We know that Jesus had been busy traveling to different towns teaching, preaching, and healing folks. The text tells us that Jesus and his disciples were tired from all the work they had been doing. Jesus and his disciples needed rest, and Jesus needed space to grieve. He needed time to mourn, to remember his beloved cousin. Our story tells us Jesus and the disciples had been so busy they hadn't even been able to eat. And if I know anything about grief, it's that no matter what, you need something to eat.

In 2021, Korean-American musician Michelle Zauner wrote *Crying in H Mart*. The book is a memoir about her mother's battle with and eventual death from cancer. When she found out her mother had been diagnosed, Michelle moved back home to care for her mother. The memoir is one of the most beautiful books I have read on love, loss, and grief.

Michelle's best memories of her mother and what reminds her most of her mother is food. The book opens with Michelle in H Mart, a grocery store specializing in Korean and Asian products. She writes, "Ever since my mom died, I cry in H Mart." The memories of trips to H Mart, the different snacks she would get with her mom at the store, the ingredients her mom would look

for, the various Korean dishes her mom would make all come flooding back to her any time she is in an H Mart. And she cries.

When Michelle arrives at home to take care of her mother, her mother is still well enough to cook. And Michelle tells her that she wants to learn to cook all the dishes her mother cooked when she was a child. Being able to cook those same dishes, will be a way for Michelle to remember and honor her mother. It will bring her comfort.

The morning after her mother's funeral, Michelle wakes up and wants to do something nice for her father and her aunt and uncle that had flown in from South Korea for the funeral. So, she makes everyone something to eat. She makes a dish that she calls the "ultimate Korean comfort food... a rich, hearty stew filled with vegetables and tofu." Her mother used to make the dish all the time and serve it alongside other food. When her aunt and uncle come downstairs, Michelle ladles stew on top of freshly made rice. They are in disbelief that she has made this meal for them. Michelle writes, "I took a seat beside them at the table and watched them spoon the broth over their rice, breaking up the tofu with the edges of their spoons, steam wisping from their mouths. For a moment I felt useful, happy that after all the years the two of them had looked after me, I could do this one small thing for them."

When we're grieving, sometimes what we most need is something to eat. The food can comfort us. It can bring memories of the one we loved. It can even begin to heal us. In our story from Mark today, we see Jesus give the hungry crowd what they need and what he most needs in the midst of his grief—something to eat.

We don't know the stories of every individual in the crowd. We don't know what they were carrying with them. Some may have been grieving like Jesus was. Some may have been weary. Others may have been overwhelmed from work responsibilities or the needs of their family or what was happening in the world around them. Others may have just been excited to see what all the fuss was about. However they came to the place where Jesus was, whatever they were carrying, what we do know is that they wanted to see Jesus. Or maybe more accurately, they wanted Jesus to see them.

They wanted Jesus to see them. They wanted Jesus to care for them.

And he did. When Jesus saw them he had compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

My friends however you have come here into this space today, I want you to know that the same Jesus who saw the hungry crowd and had compassion for them, sees you and has compassion for you. He sees you and all that you are holding, and has set a place for you in the green grass for you to get comfortable and rest a while. There's a stew and rice, and some fish and bread too. Take a load off and let the Good Shepherd care for you. You might just find that what you most need is something to eat.