

“A Meal to Remember”
Matthew 14:13-21
Holiday Island Presbyterian Church
August 6, 2017

**You know this story extremely well
and you have heard it preached many, many times, I’m sure.
And you’re pretty sure you know enough about it.**

**That is . . . if . . . you stuck to the traditional interpretation.
Which I do not intend to do.**

**So, here’s the basic outline of the miracle:
5,000 people gathered on a hillside to hear Jesus preach and teach.
Time passes and it becomes evening.
The disciples are worried about the people
and their welfare: specifically the people are hungry.**

**Jesus instructs the disciples to feed the people,
but all the disciples can produce is 5 loaves and 2 fish.**

**Jesus then takes the loaves and the fish
and - by a miracle - produces enough bread and fish
to feed everyone - with leftovers.**

**You have probably heard a dozen or so interpretations of the miracle.
How it was probably done, why it was done, on and on.**

**Today, I want to lift your spiritual sights beyond the miracle
and to see something so very simple
that may have escaped our attention.**

**Regardless of how the miracle was done -
- no matter what it was done with -
- the simple fact is that God provided!**

**God worked through Jesus,
to provide the needs of the people.
And that’s not the first time, either.
Somehow we focus on the miracle and miss the message.**

You can't help but wonder . . .

. . . was this provision of food a sign of things to come?

Should the disciples - the people gathered that day . . . and us . . .

**Should we have somehow peeked past the loaves and fishes
to see the real miracle . . . that God provides?**

Hang onto the thought of a Provident God for a moment.

If I use the word "loaves" what do you think of?

Me? I think of Russian rye bread

. . . or maybe San Francisco sourdough.

If I use the word "fish" what do you think of?

A hobby or an activity?

A restaurant?

We would all have separate opinions and answers to those questions.

But . . . when I say "loaves and fishes" - those two words together -

- suddenly we begin to focus on a united thought -

and this is the event that pops into most Christian minds.

Why do you suppose this particular miracle has gained such notoriety?

Why is it so memorable?

You know, it's not the only miracle involving food.

Earlier, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry

we have the miracle of Jesus turning water to wine.

Another example of how God provides.

Are you beginning to see where I am going with this?

Look past the miracle of loaves and fishes . . .

. . . look past the miracle of changing water to wine . . .

. . . and what you find are examples of how God provides.

Let's go a bit further . . .

**In each of the above two miracles - loaves and fishes, water to wine -
Jesus took ordinary, everyday items
and performed a miracle using them.
And through the miracle, God provided for the people.**

**Jesus used items familiar to everyone there at the time . . .
. . . and items we would identify with even today.**

**Hang on.
Here's where it gets even better.**

**At the last meal Jesus ate with his disciples before his crucifixion
Jesus took a simple loaf of bread,
broke it and offered it to his disciples and said:
"This is my body . . . broken for you."**

**Jesus also took a cup of wine
blessed it and passed it to his disciples and said:
"This is my blood."**

**Did the bread transform into the body of Jesus?
No.
Did the wine become the blood of Jesus?
No.**

That's not the miracle!

**What did happen is that Jesus took two very ordinary items
and used them to signify a new covenant
that was being made to all believers . . .
. . . God once again providing
what people cannot provide for themselves!**

**It took us a lot of years to regain the understanding
how God works through the bread and cup
instead of becoming the actual body and blood of Jesus.
Calvin, Luther and Zwingli rediscovered - and developed -
the full meaning of what happens at the Lord's Supper
during the Reformation in the mid-1500's.**

**The bread we share at the Lord's Supper
is exactly that . . . bread.**

The wine/juice we share is exactly that . . . juice of the grape.

They don't transform into anything else.

**However, they certainly do point to something far greater
than a loaf of bread and a cup of grape juice.**

**John Calvin said the sacrament of the Lord's Supper
is and "auxiliary to the word."**

First of all, it was given to us by God through Jesus

Second, it is a visual reminders of the work Jesus did for us.

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is sacred.

**Not because the bread and the cup are sacred,
for they simply remain bread and grape juice.**

**The sacrament is sacred because they are a sign
that points to a very sacred act.**

**They are the tools we use to remind ourselves
of the central message of God.**

That through Jesus, God has provided our salvation.

The Lord's Supper is a sign to us.

Paul Tillich explained it this way.

**That to which the "sign" points is not present in the sign -
- very much like a stop sign.**

A stop sign points to something greater than itself;

it is not the law, but it points to the law that says you must stop here.

The sign does not participate in the law,

it is symbol of the power and strength represented by the law.

**Roll through a stop sign while the deputy is watching
and you'll quickly understand this illustration!**

The bread and the cup go much deeper than our words can express.

**These powerful and sacred symbols of the Lord's Supper
open up a spiritual reality within us**

which cannot be reached in any other way.

What has this to do with the miracle of loaves and fishes?

Simply this . . .

**. . . if we don't look beyond the miracle itself
we may miss the message that God provides . . .
. . . and provides . . . and provides . . .**

**And through the broken body and spilled blood of Jesus -
- God made the ultimate provision for those who have been called
and who have responded to God through faith in Jesus Christ.**

**There is a strong reason why Paul said to the Corinthian church:
You should examine yourselves
before participating in the Lord's Supper.**

**We should clear our souls of anything
which would impede our union with God.**

**For indeed, it is through this act
that we participate in one of God's greatest acts -
- the act of forgiving us and reconciling us
through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus.**

Have I connected the dots sufficiently for you?

**Do you see the manna that God provided
to those He freed from bondage in Egypt . . .
. . . connects directly to the multiplying of the loaves and fishes . . .
. . . until we arrive at the bread and cup
given to us at the Lord's Supper
that we might understand and respond
to our provident God.**

**If I have done my job -
- and the Holy Spirit has amplified what I have said
and the truth is planted in your heart . . .
. . . then my job here today is done.**