

August 23, 2026
Sermon Manuscript



Matthew 15:29-39 (NIV)

²⁹ Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down. ³⁰ Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. ³¹ The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.

³² Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way."

³³ His disciples answered, "Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?"

³⁴ "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked.

"Seven," they replied, "and a few small fish."

³⁵ He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. ³⁶ Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people. ³⁷ They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ³⁸ The number of those who ate was four thousand men, besides women and children. ³⁹ After Jesus had sent the crowd away, he got into the boat and went to the vicinity of Magadan.

Now Four Thousand

This morning I want to invite us to reflect on a few questions and see where the Spirit might gently prick your heart.

- Is there any area of your life where you've been struggling to believe God's promises or believe that He will come through? This might be something you've noticed feeling anxiety or fear about.
- Or is there a lesson or truth that you feel like God has tried to teach you over and over again, whether about how He works or His better way to live, that your heart still struggles to receive? This might be something you feel guilt or shame about.
- There are gonna be ways that we all struggle with weak faith, but I do you think this can ever leave God displeased with us? I want to unpack that this morning.
- And finally, have you embraced that you have something to offer for the expansion of his kingdom here on earth, in time, talent, or even treasure, sure? Perhaps you are already serving God's kingdom in some explicit formal ways, or informal ways, but some of us may have a sense that God may inviting us to something different or into something new that will be a blessing to others or His church, and therefore a blessing to us as well.

If any of these hits something for you this morning, I want to you to know that the Lord's heart toward you is compassion and His posture toward you is patience and He will continue to bring His kingdom in and through you if you just keep following His lead at the pace that we can. And all of this is reflected in what we see of Jesus in our Gospel passage this morning from Matthew 15. #

But first, I'm curious how many of you have ever heard a sermon about Jesus' Feeding of the 4,000? I was thinking about that this week, how I have heard - and preached - what feels like *countless* sermons on His Feeding of the 5,000, as along with His resurrection is the only other miracle of Jesus that appears in *all four* gospels. But I don't think I have ever heard or given a sermon on His Feeding of the 4,000; but this miracle is in the Bible; you can check me. But even though both Matthew *and* Mark tell of this miracle, I had to change our Gospel reading to it today, because it is not covered in our three-year Sunday lectionary. I guess because it feels redundant?? I mean, aside from the difference in 4,000 vs 5,000, almost every element is the same, except the Feeding of 4,000 required a few less loaves. It even makes you wonder why Matthew & Mark even included it? Didn't it feel a little redundant to them? But there are actually reasons it is important that its inclusion is important.

First, there is some belief that this miracle continues to show that Jesus' salvation was not only for the Jews, but open to Gentiles - to non-Jews - as well. This is because in both Matthew and Mark the

Feeding of the 4,000 happens only *one chapter* after the 5,000, but between them are accounts of Jesus beginning to minister to gentiles for the first time, like with the story of the Canaanite woman we looked at last week. And this Feeding of the 4,000 happens on the West side of the Sea of Galilee, still over there in Gentile - Canaanite - country, where the Feeding of the 5,000 that happened before occurred on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, which was populated primarily by Jews. And scholars point to how in verse 31 of today's 4,000 passage, it says the crowd "praised the God of Israel", implying they had been followers of other gods, where the particular number of loaves back in the 5,000 were believed to represent the twelve tribes of Israel.

But there is a second reason I want to focus on with the rest of my time today is how it really puts the obtuseness of Jesus' disciples on full display. That is, their continued struggle to learn to trust in Jesus and their repeating this failure in the same exact way. But also the good news (for any of us who identify with that) the good news of how we see Jesus respond, which is with compassion, patience, and not giving up on them but continuing to invite them into partnership for His Kingdom. The good news is that the Lord's heart toward us is always one of compassion, His posture toward us is always one of patience, and He will continue to expand His kingdom in and through us if we will just keep following His lead at the pace that we can.

There are so many elements of this story of Jesus Feeding the 4,000 are *exactly* the same as those of the 5,000 - even though the scholarly consensus is that they were absolutely separate events. But what's really stunning to be the same is the Disciples' reaction when Jesus implies that they need to feed this enormous crowd out in the middle of nowhere. He highlights the crowd's need to eat, but says that sending them home hungry is too dangerous: that some might collapse on the way.

And it was one thing before the Feeding of the 5,000, that the Disciples were incredulous & mindboggled when Jesus suggested they feed the enormous crowd. But then He did it. They had successfully fed 5,000 men, plus women & children with twelve loaves and two fish. So you would think that *after that* they wouldn't have any doubt about Jesus' capacity in this regard. And understand: in both Matthew and Mark this Feeding of the 4,000 episode is *only one chapter* after the Feeding of the 5,000; seemingly no more than maybe a week later. But still (and again), they ask Jesus, "Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?" It feels like a scene from *Groundhog Day*. But Scholar Dale Bruner even contends that the disciples are saying this to Jesus with a tone of disrespect, not addressing Him as Lord like they often do.

But either way, if we were to put ourselves in Jesus' shoes, how would we probably then respond to them? Like, "Are you guys stupid?" "Do y'all not remember just a few days ago when we went through this exact thing?" So maybe with condescension? Or sarcasm?

But how does Jesus respond instead to their spiritual forgetfulness and almost absurd level of faithfulness (given the circumstances)? Without a hint of condemnation, but only patience, as he leads them forward in the exact same way as the occasion before. ³⁴ "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asks. And they reply, "Seven, and a few small fish." So then He just keeps guiding them forward: instructing them in how to partner with Him to bless these people.

So, this repetition we see between the Feedings of the 5,000 and the 4,000 of the disciples persisting in their struggle to trust Jesus or believe He will come through on His promises, even for the precise need or lesson He has proved Himself with before. Bruner calls this spiritual amnesia, which we're all very susceptible to. You ever had spiritual amnesia? Are there areas of your life that you continue to struggle trusting in God's care for you or to have confidence that His way of righteousness really will be better for you and for all?

Well, Jesus' response to the disciples here is meant to be an encouragement about our struggle with that: that He does not condemn us. He is patient. And He will also continue to gently lead and call us forward into the goodness He has in store (for us).

My fellow believers, do you know that there is nothing you could ever do, or fail to do, that would cause God to think less of you; to lose hope for you, to turn away from you, or give up on His desire to partner with you for good? I wonder if sometimes, in our failure (our repeated failures), we may fear that has happened - or *could* happen - that God might like us just a little less or get sorta outdone or give up on

seeking to bring His kingdom in and through our lives? But through what He has done for us in Christ, that is not even a possibility.

In the New Testament, the only references to God rejecting His people, or even becoming *displeased* with them, are two passages referencing His response to Israelites under the Old Covenant, before Jesus had come, and did what we couldn't do. I've listed those in your bulletin from 1 Corinthians 10 and Hebrews 3.

What we see in the New Testament instead is that our failures can *grieve* God; but that's the limit.

- ❖ In Mark 3, we see Jesus grieved at the religious leaders' hardness of heart - even angry at how it has harmed others - but not responding to them with wrath.
- ❖ And in Luke 19 we see Jesus grieve over the faithlessness of Jerusalem.
- ❖ Then, in Ephesians 4 Paul says, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God... (by persisting in) bitterness, rage, brawling and slander, or other forms of malice" (v30).

But the New Testament never even says we can *displease* God. It certainly suggests there are ways we can *please* God, and people often assume that means we could *displease* Him, but it never actually says that:

- In Colossians Paul exhorts us to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him" (1:10). And similarly, He writes to the Thessalonians that, "you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God" (1 Thess. 4:1).
- In 2 Corinthians he writes, "we make it our aim to please him" (2 Cor. 5:9).
- And Hebrews says that "without faith it is impossible to please (God)" (Heb. 11:6)

But it never says that we can do something to displease God, let alone do anything to separate us from His love & compassion or compromise His patience with us. [We are in Christ!]

- Even 2 Corinthians about financial generosity says "God loves a cheerful giver". But this doesn't mean that He *doesn't* love us when we are ungenerous or give out of guilt. It just means He does delight when we our hearts are joyful to give to Him!

God is grieved when we sin or fail to trust in Him, but we still could not ever exasperate God such that He would love us a single ounce less, or that He would give up on us. When we grieve Him, our worth to Him is not up for grabs; rather, He is grieved because He loves & values us and he loves those we might harm *so much!*

And all of this matters, because it means His posture toward us will always be one of encouragement and patience, and never wrath. We say it every Sunday: God's character is to always have mercy, and no matter what - no matter how many times we *might* fail - He will continue to lead and call us forward without any condemnation just like He does with Disciples here. The good news is that the Lord's heart toward us is always one of compassion, His posture toward us is always one of patience, and He will continue to expand His kingdom in and through us if we will just keep following His lead at the pace that we can. The Lord trusts and believes that our true selves in Christ are capable of so much good - Ephesians 3 says, "More than we can ask or imagine" - if we continue to avail ourselves of His help.

You know, Jesus *could have* done the miracle of feeding those 4,000 *without* His disciples' help at all. But the Lord gives us the great privilege of partnering with Him to bless others. He invites the disciples' to give him what seems like a small offering, and then they are the ones who actually distribute the bread and the fish to the crowd. And whatever we have to offer - whatever ways we use our particular capacities to serve him - we can be confident that they will make an impact even beyond what we will know.

This parish cannot thrive in what God has for us through the sheer effort of clergy or even ministry leaders. That comes through various gifts particular to each person coming together to create a context of blessing, of worship and hospitality. Today, in a little bit, we'll be talking about opportunities to serve here in the parish. And maybe there's a way to serve - listed on those subsequent pages in your bulletin - that you haven't tried before, but that the Lord might call you into. **Or** maybe He *doesn't* have something new for you right now. Perhaps you're serving beyond the church or sacrificing all you've got for the highest calling / where you have greatest authority / impact in your family. We don't guilt people into service around here; but don't sell yourself short about being gifted in ways God can use.

Don't sell yourself short about the impact you can have. I love that the passage doesn't actually

describe *how* the miracle actually happens. Matthew doesn't report the bread exploding into more and more loaves and fishes. He just says the disciples kept distributing and everyone ate and plenty was left over. And that is often how our partnership with Jesus in serving God and others works - most often any of the good fruit we do see from it is in hindsight. The good news is that the Lord's heart toward us is always one of compassion, His posture toward us is always one of patience, and He will continue to expand His kingdom in and through us if we will just keep following His lead at the pace that we can.

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.