

Toward the Cross

The Second Week of Lent

Then the Lord said to him, “What is that in your hand?”
“A staff,” he replied.

Exodus 4:2

When Jesus sent his twelve disciples out to witness and heal, He told them not to take anything with them (Matthew 10:8-10). No money, no extra clothing, nothing. The idea was that God would provide for their needs via the people they ministered to.

By the time the Twelve returned to Jesus, bursting with stories of all the amazing things God had done through them, you’d think they would have gotten used to God providing. But when they were faced with a crowd of thousands of hungry people, did they immediately look to God? Uh, no. They looked in their lunch bags and were disheartened. Perhaps we can forgive the disciples for not expecting what was coming. After all, these things are called miracles for a reason.

Yet our God has a long history of dishing up miraculous provision. So it shouldn’t have come as a total surprise when Jesus took a few meager loaves and fish and used them to feed the masses.



God takes the most mundane things and uses them for His glory: a walking staff, a jar of oil, some bread and fish. Us.

Once Jesus began His public ministry, he lived largely on the generosity of those who believed His message. He owned little beyond the clothes on His back. Yet out of love for us, He offered up the one thing He possessed: His life. And that life, once given for us, multiplied into life for millions who believe in Him.

Often, we think that we have nothing—or at least very little. Once when I was asked what I have, all I could think of in answer was “paper, lots and lots of paper.” But whether we have houses and cars and goods out the wazoo or just enough to get by, we all have something in our hands that God can use. If nothing else, like Jesus, the one thing we all have is our lives.

Most of us will never face the possibility of losing our lives for the sake of others. Most of us will never have to consider whether our personal resources could feed thousands. But Jesus can take the smallest things we hold out to Him and turn them into something that will bring Him glory and be a blessing to untold numbers of others.



How has God provided for you in the past week?

What do you have that God could use?

Exercise:

1. Commit this time to God, asking Him to speak to you throughout this exercise.
2. Read the passage.

¹⁰ When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida, ¹¹ but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.

¹² Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, “Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here.”

¹³ He replied, “You give them something to eat.”

They answered, “We have only five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all this crowd.” ¹⁴ (About five thousand men were there.)

But he said to his disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” ¹⁵ The disciples did so, and everyone sat down. ¹⁶ Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people. ¹⁷ They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.

Luke 9:10-17

3. Now read the passage below, which includes prompts to help you imagine yourself there with Jesus. As you allow your imagination to create the scene, pay attention to the details: sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and feelings.

When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him, and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida

Imagine you are with Jesus and His disciples. Everyone is still excited to tell the stories of how God moved powerfully through them, but Jesus has invited you all to go away with Him. So you're sailing on the lake. Feel the breeze on your skin. Smell the lake air. Hear the seagulls crying. What do you see? What conversations do you hear? Where are you in the boat? Where is Jesus?

... but the crowds learned about it and followed him.

When you arrive, a crowd is waiting. Hear the sounds of the people speaking on the shore. Can you see individual faces? What do they look like? How do you feel about this crowd being here? What do you see on the other disciples' faces? What do you see on Jesus' face?

[Jesus] welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God and healed those who needed healing. Late in the afternoon, the Twelve came to him ...

It's the end of this day now. Feel the warmth of the day seeping away into the evening. See the crowds still milling around. Hear their voices. Smell the dust in the air, maybe the scent of bodies. It's been a long day of serving the crowds with Jesus. Feel the tiredness of your body.

Maybe your stomach is rumbling. Are you looking forward to a relaxing evening with your friends? Maybe sitting around a fire, sharing a meal together?

... the Twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here." He replied, "You give them something to eat."

You don't understand what Jesus is saying. How can you provide for all these people? Look at your hands or in your bag. What do you have?

They answered, "We have only five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all this crowd." (About five thousand men were there.)

Why is Jesus even asking? You barely have enough food for yourselves. What do you see on Jesus' face, in His eyes? Will you give what you have to Jesus? How do you feel about this?

But he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each." The disciples did so, and everyone sat down. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people.

Jesus takes the meager offering and begins to break it apart. What do you do as you watch Him? Look at the faces of those around you—the other disciples, the people sitting nearest to you—what do they look like? How do you feel as you watch the food miraculously multiply? What do you do? What do you want to say to those around you, to Jesus?

They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.

As you collect the leftovers, what are the people saying? What are you thinking? Imagine you come back to Jesus with your basket of leftovers. Are there others around, or are you alone with Jesus? What do you see on His face, in His eyes? Does He look at the basket, at the crowds?

Now Jesus turns his attention to you alone, as if no one else is there. What does He say to you? What is your response to Him? Talk with Jesus as with a friend you trust, in a very close and intimate way. Let the conversation continue as long as it needs to.

As you finish, bring yourself gently back to the present and review with the Lord how you felt about this experience.

4. When you've finished the exercise, journal about the experience, your prayer, your conversation. Note any desires or concerns that have come up as a result of this prayer. Note anything that struck you, especially the unusual or unexpected. Ask yourself:

- Why did I feel or think or react the way I did?
- Does what stood out to me show me anything about the way I see God, myself, or others? If so, what does it show me?