

**Sermon Transcript**  
**Virtual Worship – August 2, 2020**  
**Pastor Dan Hollis**  
**Matthew 14:13-21**

The “feeding of the multitudes” is one of the more famous moments in Jesus’ ministry, and it’s really one of those passages in Scripture that has so many distinct lessons that we can draw from it. Reading through it, I feel like every other sentence brings some new theme or idea or concept to the surface that is just begging to be dug into and looked at from all different sides. It’s a story from Jesus’ ministry that we actually see told by each one of the four Gospel writers at least once, and each time we see it in the Bible it highlights different details.

But I feel like this passage from the Gospel of Matthew really is at its heart miracle story. Now when we talk about miracles, we’re really usually talking about the way that we see God’s work manifest in our lives. Sometimes we’re talking about answered prayer, and we’re talking about the ways that we pray to God, the ways that we ask God to be active in our lives, the way that we thank God for God’s work in our lives... and sometimes we’re talking about the miracles that we see when we aren’t looking for them: we turn the corner and God has done something amazing for us. And usually the focus is on God’s work in our lives, which is very important; it’s something that we’ve been preaching on a lot in the last couple of months, especially during these difficult times that we’re facing. But I think for this passage I want to shift the script a little bit, because sometimes the miracles aren’t for us, are they? Sometimes the miracles are for other people.

I feel like this passage is telling us that through God we can be and should be the miracle workers in other people’s lives. The lesson that we draw from the experiences that Jesus and his Disciples have is that when there is a need, we should fill it... and God will help us to do it.

Now, I have in my house a DVD box set (I have a few DVD box sets from the days before Netflix), and this one is from the series MacGyver, which is fairly dated--you can tell by the main character’s hair—and I’m not bringing this up just because my quarantine hair is reaching MacGyver proportions... I

think that this idea of seeing a need and filling it with whatever is at hand was really at the core of the MacGyver story.

So for those of you who never watched it—maybe you were too old or too young for it (I was too young for it but I love it anyway)—MacGyver was this fellow who had all these great ideas in his head, and ways to work through problems. And whenever a need came up—usually he was playing hockey, or he was in his home doing something, and somebody would come up and say, “All right MacGyver, we need you. You're the guy for the job.” There's something that needs to be done, and he would hang up his ice skates and go and solve the problem. What I really loved about MacGyver was... well, sometimes he would bring a bag with him—I remember in the first episode he had this really big duffel bag, and he goes in to solve this huge problem, and somebody asks him, y'know, “What's in the bag?” What did you bring to solve the problem? And he says—and I'll never forget this—“The bag isn't for what I bring along, it's for what I find along the way.” And that was really the central conceit of the MacGyver show: he would go into all of the situations and face all of these impossible needs, and he would solve them by whatever was to hand. He would defuse bombs with paper clips and sticks of gum that he found earlier in the episode, or he would seal a leaking acid vat with a bar of chocolate because he understood how the chemicals reacted... all of these strange little weird things that nobody would have thought of, he was just taking whatever he saw around the room around him and making miracles happen, because a need needed to be met. Nobody else in the show could see how that need could be met; that's why they called on MacGyver. And he would get the job done, no matter how impossible it was and no matter what he had to hand or didn't have to hand.

I think that this this idea of needs showing up right in front of our faces, these needs that are there that nobody really knows how to meet... I think that's really at the core of the message of this passage. I mean, Jesus was in this place—and I'll talk a little bit in a moment about where he was and how he got there and what that has to tell us—but he was in this place and all of these people were coming to him, these huge crowds, y'know thousands of people who had been following him and been gathering in who had heard about what he did and came to him. And there were people with needs, to be

sure. There were sick people who needed to be healed, there were people who needed to be taught—who felt that whatever Jesus had, whatever Jesus was “selling,” so to speak, was something that they wanted to “buy;” something that they needed, something that would enrich their lives and change their lives. And also there were people who needed to be fed. That's where we come to really with the “feeding of the multitudes.”

Thousands of people were out in the middle of the wilderness, out in the middle of basically nowhere is what this passage says, and they needed to be fed, among plenty of other things, and Jesus saw that need, and no matter how impossible it seemed to fill the needs of those thousands of people, Jesus said, “Now we're going to do it. It's gonna happen. We're gonna figure it out. What do we have to hand?”

Now the disciples couldn't figure out how any of them were going to solve this need. They thought, “there's no food to be found, the food that we brought is certainly not enough for these thousands of people that we weren't expecting, and they should probably go and figure that out themselves.” And those were right concerns; I mean when you're looking at things from a worldly angle, who could blame you? Who could blame the Disciples? Jesus always had something special, something new, something that that people just couldn't expect—or at least didn't think they could count on.

But here's what Jesus didn't do. He didn't blame the thousands of people who came for coming unprepared—I mean maybe they didn't have the means to have food for a day like this; maybe they were destitute, maybe they were widowed, or maybe they followed Jesus' own command to “drop everything and follow me,” and they trusted that the Lord would provide. Which isn't a very practical or God forbid realistic approach, but it's a very faithful approach... and he didn't judge them for it. He also didn't ask the Disciples to check to see if the thousands of people who had gathered maybe actually did bring food, or maybe a couple of them do have food and are holding out. He also didn't try to determine who deserved to be fed, and he didn't try to figure out who would be the most responsible with the food. He also didn't check to see who is a citizen or a foreigner, or who was faithful Jew. He also didn't ask for allegiance to him or to any statement of faith. We look at that Scripture and... he saw the need and he dealt with it. That's what Jesus did, and what

Jesus didn't do I think is telling. All of these sorts of practical concerns that people have in a practical, realistic world weren't concerns that Jesus had at the forefront of his mind when he saw a need, I think that's telling. I think that should tell us something about being Christians.

Now remember at the beginning of this passage that Jesus took a boat to get away from everybody I think this is a point that that can't be understated. Jesus' friend (and his cousin) John the Baptist had been executed, and Jesus took time to get away. I mean how can you serve others when you're met with such pain, such grief? You need to get away. Maybe he needed to process the loss. Maybe needed to plan his next steps in the face of what king Herod was doing. Maybe he needed to think about his own dark fate... a fate that just might look a little bit like John the Baptist's. And yet when he got on this boat to get away from all the people who were following him, just for a little while... they were quick, and they got to the beach before he did. Now he could have turned the boat around and gone off somewhere else; he could have gotten angry and shouted and told them all, "Go away, I'm dealing with my own stuff right now!" But he decided, "These people are in need, and I'm going to meet that need. Whether I have what's needed on hand to deal with it or not, and whether I have it within myself right now to deal with it because of all the things that are going on with me..."

A need crossed his path. And he was going to deal with. As followers of Christ, that's a lesson that we can all take to heart. He strove to meet their needs: to care for the sick, to teach the seekers, and to feed the hungry. If we consider ourselves followers of Jesus then we are obligated to keep our eyes open to the needs of the world. And when that need is there, we jump in, we make it work, even if it seems like an unimaginable pipe dream. We as Christians serve a God of miracles. We put our faith in a God of miracles. And we are the Disciples in this passage: the ones who aren't sure how to serve the needs of the world. Yet just as Christ told the Disciples to feed the hungry anyway, so too are we called to serve the physical and the spiritual needs that are out there in this world. Even when we're rightfully trying to get away from it all. And I'm not talking about huge lofty earth-shattering concepts like ending world hunger and government spending and all these big picture ideological things. Those are conversations to be had, to be sure, but this work

can happen on any level... whichever level is yours. Wherever it is that you see need, you are called to operate within it. Just like MacGyver dealt with the need that was in front of him. Just like Jesus and the Disciples dealt with the needs that were in front of them. That's what we're called to do. You don't have to serve the needs of five-thousand to be doing the will of God. You can serve the needs of the one person who crosses your path, and you're still doing the work of God. There's so many different layers and so many different situations that this can apply to. The point of it is to figure out which one you're in. To figure out where you are comfortable and where you operate and where you live and where you see need, even and especially when it seems impossible—even and especially when it seems like there's no way we could do it. Certainly not practically, certainly not realistically, certainly not “worldlily.”

When there is a need, we fill it... and God will help us do it. If we are doing that work of God, even if we don't know how we're going to do it, if we put one foot in front of the other and try to serve that need, God will work with us and through us. And through God, and—thanks be to God—through us, miracles can be done in the lives of others. And that is the Christian story, that is the Christian journey, that is the lesson of the feeding of the multitudes: that wherever we are and whatever we're doing and whatever we have to hand, we can still serve needs and should still serve that needs that we find. It's what God wants of us. It's how we take part in a truly Christian life. It's how we feed the multitudes, and in doing so... how Christ feeds the world. Thanks be to God. Amen.