

## **YOU FEED THE HUNGRY PEOPLE**

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

August 2, 2026

Jesus told his disciples that day to feed the hungry people. But there was more going on in the people's lives than simply having grumbling stomachs. There was more to feeding those people than giving them physical food. Jesus was calling his disciples to carry on the work that had been given to him from God; that of feeding the people in any way God was calling them. This work was passed down from Jesus to those first disciples, and on down through the centuries from disciple to disciple, to you and me. Each Christian who calls themselves a disciple of Jesus, are given the same task; to be fed by Jesus Christ, and to in turn, feed others, in their own unique way.

As those first disciples looked with concern at the crowds around them, they said to Jesus: "the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." This story is about bread and fish; about the need of many, many, hungry people to be fed. But that's only one of the surface meanings to the story. It is also about healing. And, on a deeper level, it is about the more vital work of feeding the people's deeper needs. Needs that you and I have as well.

Jesus, his disciples, and the 5,000 or so individuals in that remote place had become very hungry by the end of a long day of ministry. And the request the disciples asked of Jesus, to send the people into the village thirty minutes away to get food, made perfect sense. It is what you or I would have naturally done as well. But Jesus saw in this situation an opportunity to teach his disciples.

I am going to guess that before Jesus responded to their desperate request, that he may have paused to look into each of his disciples eyes; scanning their faces to discern the depth of their faith, and how far he might be able to stretch their understanding. He knew that they were not yet up to the task that he was about to give them. But he knew that he needed to say the words anyway. For as he knew all too well, that the work his Abba God had given him to accomplish, would soon be handed over to them to carry on. And they must be ready for that work. So, he said to them firmly: “YOU, feed these people.” Immediately he saw the utter shock on their faces, mere seconds before they started scrambling around in their packs to see what food they could scrounge up; knowing how woefully inadequate it would be.

Jesus deeply loved these men and knew how willing they were to please him; to do whatever he would ask of them if it was in their power. But this request was WAY beyond their ability. But Jesus knew that they would try in the only way they knew how; they would quickly turn to their own natural resources to try and do what Jesus would ask of them. These faithful passionate men were not yet able to see much beyond the world in front of their eyes; beyond that which they could know from their five senses; that which they understood literally.

These first disciples had still not reached the point where they could comprehend the deeper layers of meaning to Jesus’ words about the will of God and God’s kingdom. And so, after digging around in their packs, they sheepishly, and with some embarrassment, responded to Jesus: “Master, we have only five loaves of bread and two fish!” They knew that what they had to give would only be enough to feed fifteen or so people. A mere drop in the bucket compared to the 5,000 hungry people scattered on the hillside!

But Jesus knew that the people hungered for much more than bread and fish. There was a deeper, more significant hunger within each of these individuals; a spiritual hunger. On a different day of ministry Jesus had addressed this deeper hunger while standing next to a well speaking with a Samaritan woman. His disciples had finally returned with their lunch.

Here's what that other story has to teach us about hunger. "The disciples were urging Jesus, 'Rabbi, eat something.'" – On that day Jesus and his disciples had grown hungry as well, and he had sent them into the village to get some food. And as they now returned with lunch, they were having a hard time understanding why Jesus wasn't more desperate to slam down a cheeseburger. The story continues: "But [Jesus] said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.'" You see, Jesus was telling his disciples that satisfying hunger with food was about much more than bread and fish. He was telling them that what really sustained him, his most important "food," was the accomplishment of his father's will; not a burger or bread and fish.

Now let's get back to those 5,000 people. As Jesus and the disciples stood near the hungry crowd, the people's real need, was about more than bread and fish to fill their stomachs, as important as that need was. Assisting people's physical hunger is God's important work. I'm thankful that this parish does this work so well. We give people bread and baked goods and canned goods and support the distribution of food on our property through All Faiths Food Bank.

The work of God that day in Palestine was also the feeding of people with bread and fish and healing the many with physical ailments. But the work of

God in fulfilling God's will was also seen in Jesus' teaching the people about his Father's loving kingdom. Bread and fish that day was about more than bread and fish. As Jesus asked his disciples to feed the 5,000, he was not asking them to multiply bread and fish, he was trying to increase their faith; to deepen their faith; to help them to see more than tilapia and barley; and full bellies. He was preparing them for deeper, more meaningful work ahead in accomplishing his Father's will; not only the feeding of stomachs, but the feeding of hungry Souls.

There are many similarities here to the story of that Samaritan woman at the well. In that story, it was not about food, but about drink. As Jesus talked to her about living water; it was about more than quenching physical thirst. He was teaching her about spiritual thirst. That in drinking of his living water she would never thirst again, because as God's messiah, he would slake her spiritual thirst.

Jesus knew that his work would one day be handed off to his first disciples, and then on to those who would come after them, eventually to you and me. And we would all need to be prepared for this work. Yes, the work of feeding bodies; but also, the work of feeding the need of the human soul through love and kindness and compassion. But to be ready for this work, Jesus disciples needed to see more clearly. They needed to perceive more of the depths of his Father's reign in this world.

You and I, in our response to Jesus' calling, are no different than those first disciples who instinctively turned to what they knew and could see; responding from their normal level of conscious awareness; understanding things literally through their five senses. Those first disciples, and you and me; we all need to be open to, and receive, deeper levels of inner

transformation; to more, and more, see as Jesus saw, and do all the work that Jesus did, and that he has handed on to you and me:

Henri Nouwen wrote a book called “The Wounded Healer.” He said that none of us escapes life without emotional, mental, or spiritual wounds. Because of these wounds, we need the light and love of Jesus to bring healing to our lives. But we also need the light of Jesus that is seen in others, to help us heal. That is part of the reason we affiliate with a church and attend services. We come to receive and be healed. But we do not come on Sunday just to receive; to have our needs met. We are more than just wounded people.

We are also called to be healers. We come together to give and to serve. Nouwen tells us that instead of hiding our pain, a disciple of Jesus can use their personal scars and past suffering to understand and comfort other hurting people. We come together to give.

We give financially and being active in various ministries to feed bodies; but also, to feed the need of the human soul through love and kindness and compassion. But to be ready for this work, Jesus disciples must continually see more clearly. They need to perceive more of the depths of the reign of God in this world.

That work; Jesus’ work; our work; has been this: To feed and care for the outward needs of the people; bread and canned goods and groceries and college scholarships and the supporting of 501C3’s. But that work is also, to bring God’s good news of equity and justice for all who walk this life with us; the raising up of the downtrodden and unseen. And to help heal those with broken hearts and minds, and to help people see the glorious unconditional passionate love of God for them; to bring sight to the

spiritually blind. May we love deeper; see further; strive more passionately; to accomplish this glorious loving work handed on to us from our Lord.  
Amen.