

What Little We Had Turns to Leftovers

October 12, 2025

Welcome to the Beamsville Church of Christ Online Ministry. This week's message is titled, "What Little We Had Turns to Leftovers." It was recorded at Alumni and Friends Weekend at Great Lakes Christian High School. Thank you to Noel, Don, Nathan, Martin, and everyone else involved in the service. The scripture reading is John 6, 1-14.

Happy birthday this week to Tina, and happy anniversary to John and Connie.

Scripture Reading

John 6:1-14 (NIV)

Sometime after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee, and the great crowd of people followed them because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountain side and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover festival was near. When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming towards him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite." Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far would they go among so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people sit down. There was plenty of grass in that place," and they sat down. Jesus then took the loaves and gave thanks and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same of the fish. When they had all enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled 12 baskets of pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world."

Sermon

Well, I'm deeply grateful to gather in our communal worship with each other, to gather around a table that's meant to bring us together rather than separate us. Deeply grateful, even if the bread tasted really stale. I'm grateful for the songs. Let's begin as we enter into the Word of God with a prayer. Let's pray together.

Oh God, as we gather around your holy Word, give us ears to hear so that we can be shaped by your words, so that we can be people who will live your words. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

When Don asked if I could be the featured speaker for our worship, I asked, "Is there a text of Scripture that you want me to preach from? Is there a theme?" And he said, "Nope. You got whatever you want. Pick your favorite text. Just keep it under 20 minutes." Now, Gary Kennedy met me this morning, and he said, "I hope it's 18 minutes." And I said, "No, it's 24," and he rolled his eyes.

(Audience Laughing)

So I started to think, "Well, what is my favorite text?" And immediately, Luke 10, 1-12 came to my mind. That text shapes my ecclesiology. It shapes my understanding of how we, our gods, send people into the world. It shapes the ministry I'm a part of. Luke 10, 1-12 is one of my favorites. And then, there's Revelation 21.5. Do you know what Revelation 21.5 says? It says, "Behold, I make all things new." I think churches need to have those words somewhere in our buildings all the time. Bulletins on a banner, stenciled on a wall. We need those words. "Behold, I make all things new." Because in our context, we need to always be reminded God is in the business of new creation.

And I've actually, believe it or not, thought that I would actually tattoo those words on my body. I've wanted to tattoo them on my arm right here. But Mr. Ed's grade 12 biology class taught me something, that I have this deep fear of needles. (Audience Laughing) Mr. Ed took us on a field trip to give blood. And we were going down to the local blood bank. I don't know where it was, and Joel Osborne is standing in line in front of me. And he's getting his finger pricked. And you could see his legs were shaking. You could see the blood draining from his head. And we all were betting, "This guy's going down." He gets his finger pricked, and he stumbles away from the table. We're all watching. He's going down. And the nurse says, "Next." And I hand her my papers, and I go out on the table. (Audience Laughing) So Mr. Ed's biology class taught me, "I can never get a tattoo. I can hardly ever get a needle without going down."

And then, there's the third passage. John 6, 1-14, one of my favorites. We have some new people at our church who know, believe it or not, absolutely nothing about Jesus. They know nothing of Jesus. And they came to me one day, and they said, "Can you teach us about Jesus?" Sure. Sure, I can teach you something about Jesus, but I'll tell you what. Why don't we read the Gospel of John together? Why don't we read through John's Gospel, and every time we learn something about Jesus, why don't we write it down and see what John tells us about who Jesus is? And they thought that was a great idea. "We only have one problem," they said. "We don't have a Bible." "You don't have a Bible?" "No." I said, "Well, we can fix that." So we got them some Bibles, and we marked the Gospel of John in the Bible, and we said, "Read this, "and in two more weeks, we'll get together, "we'll have a cup of coffee, "and we will learn what Jesus says about who Jesus is." And they were very excited to do this. Two weeks go by, and I'm about to meet them for a coffee, and I think, "Oh, shoot. "I should read John's Gospel "and see what John says about Jesus." So I sit down in my office, in my desk, and I start reading through John's Gospel, and do you know what I notice?

There's always a crowd that is following Jesus. There's always a crowd. And I think for good reason. I mean, Jesus is at a wedding, and at the wedding, they run out of wine. So Jesus makes more wine out of water. And when people see this, they start following him. I would, too. And then, there's a royal official son who-- he's dying. The child's dying. The best royal medicine, the best royal money, can't heal the child. And so, he comes to Jesus in a last-ditch effort, and he says, "My child's gonna die. "Can you do something?" And Jesus says, "Yeah. Go home. Your child's gonna live." And the official took him at his word, and he went home, and the child lived. And when people see this, they start following Jesus. Or they see a man who's lying by a pool. He can't walk. He can't walk for several years, decades, and now, suddenly, Jesus shows up, and the man can walk. And people see this. And they start following Jesus. And I would, too. If I see someone who

can turn water into wine, you know, heal a child, heal a man who can't walk for several years, I'm gonna follow that guy, too. I'm gonna see what's going on.

So, a large crowd is following Jesus. And John says it's the Passover, which we know what that means. It means the biggest party of the year. There's gonna be a crowd of thousands of people arriving in Jerusalem. Jerusalem's gonna swell numerically. It's gonna be a great party, where people gather, and they tell the story of God who liberated the slaves out of Egypt. And as they tell the story, it's gonna give people hope. Hope that maybe God has the power to do new things in this world.

So, they're in Jerusalem. There's a large crowd following Jesus. It's near the Passover, and Jesus takes everyone up on a mountainside. There's about 5,000 men not counting women and children. And Jesus goes up on a mountainside, and he sits down. And he looks over the crowd. And he turns to Philip and says, "Where do you think we should buy bread for all these people?" And I can imagine, Phil, looking around, going... "I really don't know. "I don't think six months' wages can feed all these people. "What do you think?" Andrew shows up. Thank God for Andrew. Andrew shows up, and he says, "It's okay, Phil. "We got a little boy over here. "He's got a sack lunch. "He's got a few loaves of bread. "He's got some salted fish. "But what are these amongst so many people?"

So, Jesus takes the bread, and he takes the fish, and in the language of the Lord's Supper, he blesses it, and he breaks it, and he gives it to the disciples to give to the crowd. And after everyone had eaten their fill, Jesus says to the disciples, "Okay, now go on out "and collect all the leftovers "so that nothing's gonna be lost."

Now, I have a question I wanna ask about this story. Who are you in this story? Who are you? As the story was read by that young man, as I just retold that story, "Who are you? "Who did you go, that's me? "That's me. "I can resonate with them. "I can be that person. "I know that person. "Who are you? "Let me help you." There's some characters.

The first character, I think, is a large crowd. There's a large crowd following Jesus. They see what Jesus is doing. They like what Jesus is doing. They see him turn water into wine. They see him heal a child. They see him heal laymen. They like what Jesus is doing, and they like what he says, and so they're gonna follow him. They're not disciples. They just like what Jesus is doing, and they're gonna follow him and see what happens.

Or there's the disciples. The disciples are part of the large crowd, but the disciples have more faith. They've been called by God. They're kind of the insiders. When something needs to be done, they get the call. They're the ones who are the doers. They're the ones who are the movers and the shakers. They're the ones who are the friends of Jesus.

Crowds, disciples, or maybe you can resonate with Philip and Andrew. You see a problem. You gotta feed 5,000 people at least, but we only have a few loaves of bread and some fish, and we just don't have enough. They're realistic. They understand, "We have this issue. Do we have the resources?" Some churches have a growing youth group, and they would like to start a youth group. They would like to start doing something. We just don't have a youth ministry yet, so we can't do anything. Some churches would like to do certain things, but we just don't have the

money in the bank yet, so we can't do it. Well, we would really like to do this, and we would really like to do that. Well, yeah, but you-- we don't have a ministry yet. We're having a hard time finding a minister, so we just can't do it yet. I think that's Philip and Andrew. We gotta feed 5,000 people. Well, we just don't have enough resources, so I don't know what we're gonna do. Does that resonate with anyone?

There's other people in this story. I don't know if you've noticed. I'm gonna call this next group "Large Crowd Number 2." Because it's kind of the same crowd, but if you follow the story, they move from following Jesus to tasting the gifts that God is giving. These are people who have followed Jesus because they like what they see and they like what they hear, but now, they're starting to taste the gifts that God is giving, like my friend Klaus.

I met Klaus when I performed a funeral for his mother-in-law. He liked what we said as a church. He liked what we did as a church. He liked to hear the stories of Jesus, and so, he started following along with us, and then, eventually, he became the chef for our church. We called him "The Church Chef." Every time we had a meal, he would cook. Every time we had a neighborhood meal, he would cook. Every time there was food involved, Klaus was gonna be the cook. He was gonna be the chef. And somewhere along the road, he started to taste the gifts of God. He was following, and then, he started to taste what God was giving him.

There's another group. I'm gonna call this next group "Disciples Number Two." Yeah, it's the same group, but if you look at the story closely, "Disciples Number Two," something happens. They're the ones who pick up the leftovers. They're the ones who get surprised at what God is doing in their midst. I can't imagine the disciples, with a solemn look on their face, picking up leftovers. Gah, can you imagine we gotta pick up leftovers? What does Jesus think we are? I think they were walking around with baskets, picking up leftovers, going, "Ho-lee cow! "Can you believe what just happened? "Jesus fed all these people with a couple loaves of bread "and some salted fish." I think they're picking up the leftovers surprised at what God does in this world.

Gary is probably the baddest dude I have ever met in my life. I once watched him drink a 26-ounce bottle of whiskey on the front pew of our church at a funeral and then get up and walk out the door as if nothing happened. And now, Gary walked through the waters of baptism and he's an addiction counselor, in the city of Toronto. And I pick up the leftovers and I say, "I can't believe God has the power "to take a guy like Gary and transform his life." Or I think of my friend Susan, who, in her late 60s, walked through the waters of baptism, and I called my friend Jared, and I said, "Jared, you're not gonna believe this story. "I gotta tell you what just happened." I'm picking up the leftovers. I'm surprised at what God does in this world.

So who are you? Some of you might just be the crowd that's following Jesus because you like what you see. Some of you might be the disciples, you're the insiders, you're the movers, the shakers, Philip and Andrew. Maybe you're starting to taste the gifts of God. Maybe you're surprised at what God is doing. Who are you in this story?

Before you decide, there's one more character. And if you notice, in this story, this character doesn't ever say a word. He doesn't say a word in this story, but without this character, the story would not have taken place. And you guessed it-- a little boy. Doesn't say anything, doesn't do anything, except gives Jesus his lunch.

There's a church in Sao Paolo, Brazil. Sao Paolo is a city of about 23 million people. Think about that for a second. A city of about 23 million people. And inside the city are what are called "favelas." In English, we would call them "shack cities." They're cities that rise up within the larger city of some of the most impoverished, broken people found in the city. In the middle of one of these "favelas" is a church. Small church. Nothing big about it. They never have the resources. They never have enough money. They never have enough volunteers. They never have enough people. They never have enough to fix the brokenness of the world. Outside the doors of the church, on a daily basis, are people who sleep on the streets. Outside the doors of the church, there's people who line up asking for food for the day. Outside the doors of the church, there are people who ask for health care. And the church never has enough. They never have enough space in the church to put the homeless to sleep at night. Inside the church, there's never enough food to feed all the hungry people. There's never enough people to heal the sick.

But what they have some days is extra bread. And so, a group of volunteers come, and they take the loaves of bread, and they wrap them in white linen cloth, and then they walk outside of the church, and everyone who's sleeping on the sidewalks, they lay a loaf of bread wrapped in white linen cloth at the feet of those who are sleeping on the sidewalk. And when I first heard that story, I thought, "Does that make a difference? "Does that make a difference, not having enough, "but just going and laying some bread down at the feet "of those who are sleeping on the sidewalk?" Seems kind of foolish, if you ask me, about as foolish as a little boy who gives Jesus his sack lunch when there's 5,000 people who are hungry.

The church doesn't have a lot. In a world of much-need, lack of health care, food insecurity, war, death, disease, we don't have a lot to give. We don't have the resources. We don't have the resources to feed 5,000 people. We don't have the skill to fix the brokenness of the world. We don't have enough. But there's this story that haunts us. It's the story of a little boy who didn't have enough either, and he gave what he had to Jesus. And this story now haunts us, because maybe Jesus has the power to take what we have and make it enough.

So do you think it's possible that the little forgiveness that you can give will be enough to break the vicious cycle of hatred and separation? Do you think it's possible that the little money that you can give away is gonna be enough to make a difference in someone's life? Do you think it's possible that the little peace that you are able to share will be enough in a hate-filled world to make a difference? Do you think it's possible that the few lines of a prayer that you can pray in the darkest of the night will be enough to let light shine in the dark world? Do you think it's possible that the time you can give to someone is gonna make a difference? Do you think it's possible that a church that's placing a loaf of bread wrapped in a white linen cloth at the feet of someone who's sleeping on a sidewalk is gonna make a difference?

So who are we in this story? Maybe the crowd, maybe the disciples, maybe Philip and Andrew, or maybe we're a little boy, but we're not having a lot, not having enough, but what we have, we give to Jesus. This, I am convinced, is what God does. It's not what you and I are able to do. It's not what you and I have that can fix the brokenness of the world. It's what God can do. So we give to God what little we have, and we trust it's gonna be enough. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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