

“The followers filled twelve baskets with the leftover pieces of bread and fish.” (6: 43)

There are two kinds of people in the world: those who don’t mind leftovers, and those who despise them. Wherever you stand, today’s gospel reading ends with leftovers, and those leftovers tell you quite a bit about Jesus. They tell you a lot about the generosity of God, and they tell you something about discipleship—about being a student of and a follower of Jesus.

Let’s set the stage again, beginning with verse 35: When it was late in the day, his followers came to him and said, “No one lives in this place, and it is already very late. 36 Send the people away so they can go to the countryside and towns around here to buy themselves something to eat.”

37 But Jesus answered, “You give them something to eat.”

They said to him, “We would all have to work a month to earn enough money to buy that much bread!”

38 Jesus asked them, “How many loaves of bread do you have? Go and see.”

When they found out, they said, “Five loaves and two fish.”

39 Then Jesus told his followers to have the people sit in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat in groups of fifty or a hundred. 41 Jesus took the five loaves and two fish and, looking up to heaven, he thanked God for the food. He divided the bread and gave it to his followers for them to give to the people. Then he divided the two fish among them all. 42 All the people ate and were satisfied. 43 The followers filled twelve baskets with the leftover pieces of bread and fish. 44 There were five thousand men who ate.

So, did you notice the leftovers? Twelve baskets full; historians seem to think these were pretty big baskets, too. I don’t think it was a coincidence that there were twelve baskets full of leftover bread and fish—that works out to one basket per disciple. There’s so much here for us to consider and apply. Let’s get into it, and start with something that is all too familiar.

In verse 35 and 36, the men who have been following Jesus come to him, and they’ve done two things. They have defined a problem, and they’ve come up with their solution. The problem is: No one lives in this place; it’s getting late; this huge group of people needs to eat. That’s actually pretty thoughtful of them, and so they have a practical solution ready to go: they tell Jesus, “Send the people away so they can go buy food.” That sounds sensible and very reasonable, but they will quickly learn that is not the solution Jesus has in mind.

Let me ask: Have you ever defined a problem and come up with a solution that you want Jesus to bless? We can often be very confident that we have diagnosed both problem and solution accurately, as I’m sure the disciples were. But, it’s easy for us to make mistakes. Like the

disciples, our vision can be way too small. And, whenever we presume to tell Jesus how he ought to do things, we have reversed the flow of the relationship, which is never a good idea. So right here in the story, Jesus redirects the flow.

He says, “You give them something to eat.” I imagine Jesus smiling tolerantly as he says this. His disciples have thoughtfully decided on a plan that you’ll notice does not involve them. Their plan says, ‘let them go and buy food.’ Jesus basically says, “That’s nice, but I want *you* to do something. You give them something to eat.”

It is both predictable and understandable that the disciples object. They tell Jesus this isn’t in the budget. They do not yet understand their role in the kingdom. They do not yet understand how much the King has to give. But they soon will. Jesus is going to give them a couple things to do. One seems very mundane, but it’s worth noting that Jesus told his followers to have the people sit in groups. He could’ve just told the people where to sit and I’m sure they would have. But he involved his followers. He wanted them to go and do. After he begins to miraculously multiply the bread and fish, again, he could’ve walked among the crowds distributing his gifts, but that’s not what he did. He gave the food to his followers and had them give it away. He wanted them to go and do.

And to their credit, they did! To their credit, they don’t argue with Jesus, or stick to their old plan. Whether or not they understood what Jesus was up to, they did what he said. And what were the results?

First and foremost, people were helped. Five thousand men and whoever was accompanying them ate and were satisfied, meaning they ate until they were full. No one died from hunger out there in the desolate place where Jesus had been teaching. That’s a good thing.

But also think about the object lesson this would have been for the disciples, as they each took their basket around, gathering up the leftovers, filling them up with bread and fish at the close of this improvised feast. According to their plan, they all would’ve had to work for a month to earn enough money to buy bread, but now, in the span of, what—an hour? Jesus had provided more than enough. Can you imagine? You had stood there and told Jesus to send people away, and now you are holding this basket of leftover food that people couldn’t even finish. What would that basket say to you?

Ultimately, I think it would say, “Jesus knows best, so do what he says to do. And when you do, far more will happen than you can imagine.”

Some of you I know have experienced this, firsthand. You’ve set your plans aside and let Jesus have final say, and then watched as he multiplied the resources in ways you never expected. People were helped, and you saw what Jesus is capable of when you go and do.

It must be said that this takes trust and faith and humility. It takes humility to abandon your plans and follow Jesus’ directions instead. It takes faith to believe that Jesus is going to do something through me, especially when I don’t know what that something is. It takes trust, especially when I don’t understand how God is going to do it. Yet this is not blind trust. Look at the Lord’s track record of giving more than enough, in both the Bible and your own personal history. This is not

blind faith. Look at how far God went for you. It would've been enough for Jesus to cancel our sin debts on the cross, but He went beyond that. His resurrection is also something He shares with you. You are not just "off the hook" as far as sin is concerned, but you are invited into loving relationship with God the Father. You are made part of a caring community. You can have an entirely different perspective on death and life. You can dedicate yourself to His cause with excitement and great courage. Why? Because we have a twelve-baskets-of-leftovers kind of God. You have a more-than-enough kind of God.

Knowing this, you can step into whatever is next, remembering that Jesus knows best; and doing what he says to do, you can expect him to do far more than you can imagine. There's no better way to live.