

Let's go back in time. The children of Israel had been in Egypt for 430 years and had suffered bitterly, but the God of Israel heard his people's cry and raised up his servant Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt and into the land promised to their forefathers. Through Moses he performed miracles to bring them out of bondage. Once they were set free by the Lord, they grumbled and complained. They accused Moses of bringing them out into the desert to die of starvation! Still, God had a purpose for them. He had provided freedom; now he would provide miraculous food in the wilderness: manna sent from heaven.

Martin Luther wrote this about God the Father: “He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life.” Our heavenly Father provides for all creation, not just in the extraordinary way of manna from heaven, but also in the ordinary way of our everyday needs—a provision we too often take for granted.

But the provision doesn't stop with material needs. Our Father provides for our greatest need—the need in our soul that has a hard time being satisfied. For this reason, God sent His Son, and in Jesus we meet His generous Father, who gives more than enough.

The words of Psalm 104 articulate a familiar prayer said by many before a meal: “The eyes of all look to you, O Lord, to give them their food at the proper time.” In these words, we acknowledge that all creatures, including each of us, look to God as the ultimate Provider. It is the entire created world that looks to the Father of whom the psalmist wrote, “...in wisdom have you made them all...the earth is full of your creatures.”

Yet God may not always provide according to our timetable; rather, as the Psalmist says he gives “in due season”—that is to say, at the right time, the time that's best for us. There are some old sayings that have almost become cliches that describe how most of us approach God's timing, such as, “Lord grant me patience, but hurry!”

We're told in Scripture that when the Father sent that miraculous manna to the Israelites during the exodus, all they had to do was gather it up and they were satisfied. The Psalmist uses the same words as Moses used to describe the manna in exodus, however, in the Psalm it's *all* creatures that receive the everyday gifts of the Lord's provision. “When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.”

Most of creation, of course, is quite naive to this. How many people on earth realize that their jobs and incomes; their grocery store purchases; their suits and blue jeans; their airline tickets to vacation spots; all the ways we “gather it up,” are provisions of the Father in heaven? That's how everything created by God survives on earth—including all human beings—those who know the Father and those who do not.

And right there we are given great insight into the character of God; A window is opened into who God is and what He is like. Do you see? He provides for those who know Him and

those who don't. He gives to those who ask, and to those who wouldn't dream of asking. That goes for the "stuff of life," and that goes for the deeper things. And the greatest window into who God is is Jesus! Whether people asked for it or not, He approached them with blessings of body and soul. One place to see this all come to life is the story of the feeding of the five thousand.

*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. Send the people away so they can go to the countryside and towns around here to buy themselves something to eat." 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!" 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." Then Jesus told his followers to have the people sit in groups on the green grass. So they sat in groups of fifty or a hundred. 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. All the people ate and were satisfied. The followers filled twelve baskets with the leftover pieces of bread and fish. 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.

Let's take note of how Jesus provides. 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: These people need to eat. Their solution is: "Send the people away so they can go buy food." 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. I'm sure the disciples were.

But, like the disciples, our vision can be way too small. Jesus' 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 instead says, "I want you to do something. You give them something to eat." It is both predictable and understandable that the disciples object. They do not yet understand how much the King has to give. But they soon will.

Jesus gives 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 miraculously multiplies 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? 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 you have a twelve-baskets-of-leftovers kind of God. You have a more-than-enough kind of God.

Isn't it something? This Advent, you have the opportunity to show how God provides. With Christmas on the way, and the Christ of Christmas in your sights, what will you go and do?