You’ve just heard the story, but let’s go through it again. I’ll still follow the basic outline of this miracle story as you heard it in Mark, but I’ll be supplementing with details from the other gospels. This is one of the few stories that is found in all four gospels, and especially the Gospel of John adds a few more specifics.

Jesus had sent his twelve disciples out on a mission trip, and now they’ve come back to report. They’re all excited. Few things can change your outlook on life more than an intense time dedicated to serving others, such as we have in mission trips. I would love for every church member to have that experience at least once. But anyway, they’re back and want to tell Jesus what they saw and did, but they can’t. The crowds are all around, clamoring for healing and for miracles, to the extent that Jesus and the twelve can’t even grab a moment to eat. Jesus says, “Let’s get on the boat and cross the lake.” He did this a lot, actually. Sometimes the only way he could grab a nap was to have Peter or James take him out on their fishing boat, where there were no crowds. So the disciples pile into a boat and push off from land.

Maybe they had time to report on their trip and even grab some lunch while they were in the boat. I hope so, anyway, because when they arrived at the other side of the lake, in a deserted area where they had expected to be alone, they found a crowd waiting for them. Apparently they’d pulled the boat trick once too often, and the people had figured it out. They’d just run around the lake and waited. I don’t know with what sort of weariness Jesus looked on the waiting crowd, but you had to respect the people’s effort – running ten miles or so to see him. He looked at them, and his heart broke with sympathy for them. They were like sheep without a shepherd, aimless, uncertain, looking eagerly for someone to give them some sense of direction and purpose. “Come on,” Jesus said. “Let’s go talk to them.”

We don’t know what he taught that day. Parables of the kingdom, maybe. Some of the Sermon on the Mount? Don’t set your foundations on the shifting sands of this world; build your home on the rock of eternal God! Don’t lay up treasures on earth; they’ll just rust. Lay up your treasures in heaven. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; God can take care of
the other things without you. But he taught for a long time. At last the disciples pulled him aside. “Um, master?” “Yes?” “It’s getting really late, and we’re not in a town. The people are hungry. You should send them away so that they can buy food, and so they don’t faint from hunger while they’re with us. This was probably the disciples’ Board of Trustees, thinking about liability. Jesus said, “You know they’re hungry, and you want me to send them away?”

Last week, as I opened this sermon series on Meals with Jesus, I talked about the gift of food. I stressed that God intended food to be enjoyed, and that we should rejoice in that good gift of God. But having said that, I need to add one more thing: God gave the good gift of food to everyone, not just us. When we have more than we need of this gift and someone else doesn’t have any at all, that’s a problem. It isn’t enough to thank God for the gifts we’ve received if we aren’t going to make any effort to help God give those gifts also to others. Again, Jesus looked at his disciples and said, “Send away hungry people? No. No, I don’t think we can do that. You feed them.”

Now Philip, one of the disciples spoke up. Lord, I’m estimating something over 5000 people out there. If we assume that everyone only gets one small loaf of bread, and computing that at the average per loaf cost, then we’d need more than 200 denari to pay for that meal. Philip was chair of finance. Jesus ignored the cost analysis. Instead, he said, “How much bread do we have? Go check.” A minute later, here comes Andrew, holding a little boy by the hand. “Master, um, there’s this boy. He heard us talking and he says he wants to give us his lunch. It’s, um, five loaves. And a couple of fish.”

Philip said. “All right. That’s a start. And for the other 4,995?”

Jesus ignored him again. Kneeling next the boy, he said, “And are you sure you want to give away all that you have?” The boy nodded, and Jesus smiled. “We should be good then. Everything is always enough.” He took the basket of bread, then raised his eyes to heaven and gave thanks.

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them up to the Lord.
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.
It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Almighty God, creator of Heaven and Earth. When there was nothing, you spoke and there was Something. And whatever you spoke into being was good, and whatever you spoke into being was enough. You made the earth, the plants, and creeping things, the beasts, and humans, and breathed into them the breath of life. And you made it all so that there was also enough food and air and light and water that life might continue and grow and expand and it was all good. And so, with the company of your creation on earth and with all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,**  
*Heaven and earth are full of your glory.*  
**Hosanna in the highest.**  
**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.**  
**Hosanna in the highest.**

Then Jesus began breaking the bread *[break the loaves and place in baskets]*, saying to the disciples, “Organize the people, arrange them in groups so that we can distribute the food fairly.” That was the missions committee. They separated the crowd into groups of about 50, and all this time, Jesus was breaking the bread. He just kept breaking the bread, and the baskets filled up. The disciples began to look over their shoulder at him, then stare. The man just kept breaking bread. More and more bread. He kept on breaking bread.

The Gospel of John adds one unique detail here. John notes that when Jesus performed this miracle, it was Passover time. Later, at another Passover, his disciples would remember this day, as they watched Jesus again breaking bread. It was the night before Jesus would die, though only Jesus knew it. He had gathered alone with his disciples, saying, “I have been longing to have this meal with you.” He took bread, and he broke it, giving thanks and then giving it to his disciples. “This bread is my body, which is given for you. Take some. Pass it to your neighbor. Remember me.” *[Ushers come forward and begin handing out the basket of broken pieces of bread, up and down the aisle. Then they come back for the cup.]* In the same way, when the bread had been distributed, he took a cup of wine, gave thanks, then handed it to his disciples saying, “This cup is my blood of a new covenant, a new way of related to God, made possible by my death. When you drink it, remember me.” *[Ushers take cups to the pews.]*
So, in the breaking of the bread, we remember Christ’s death on our behalf. Hand the cup down the pew to your neighbor. As your neighbor dips the bread in the cup, say, “This is the body and blood of Christ.” All are welcome. There is enough.

[After nearly everyone is served and the ushers are bringing the baskets and cups back to the table] So, back to that hillside with that hungry crowd. Jesus kept breaking bread until everyone had been fed, and kept breaking bread until there were twelve baskets of pieces left over. God has been good to us. We have enough. In fact, we have more than enough. We have enough and to spare. It’s tempting, as we watch our budgets and monthly financial reports, to fall into the mindset of scarcity, to fret about what we don’t have, to worry about what we might have to give up to make ends meet. And those are valid questions, and I thank God for the finance committee and Board of Trustees and Staff-Parish Relations, who consider those hard questions with me. But even as we face those decisions, we must always remember this: We have enough to share. We have enough to minister to others. We have enough to serve the hungry and guide the lost sheep. In the breaking of the bread, we remember this.

There’s a postscript to this story in John. The next time the crowd found him, they said, “Feed us again,” and Jesus said, “You want food that will last? I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me and trusts in me will always have enough of what really matters.”

(Hymn: In Remembrance of Me)

Blessing: And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving
as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ’s offering for us,
as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here,
and on these gifts of bread and wine.
Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ,
that we may be for the world the body of Christ,
redeemed by his blood.
By your Spirit, make us one with Christ,
one with each other,
and one in ministry to all the world,
until Christ comes in final victory,
and we feast at his heavenly banquet.
Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy church, all honor and glory is yours, almighty God, now and forever.

Amen.