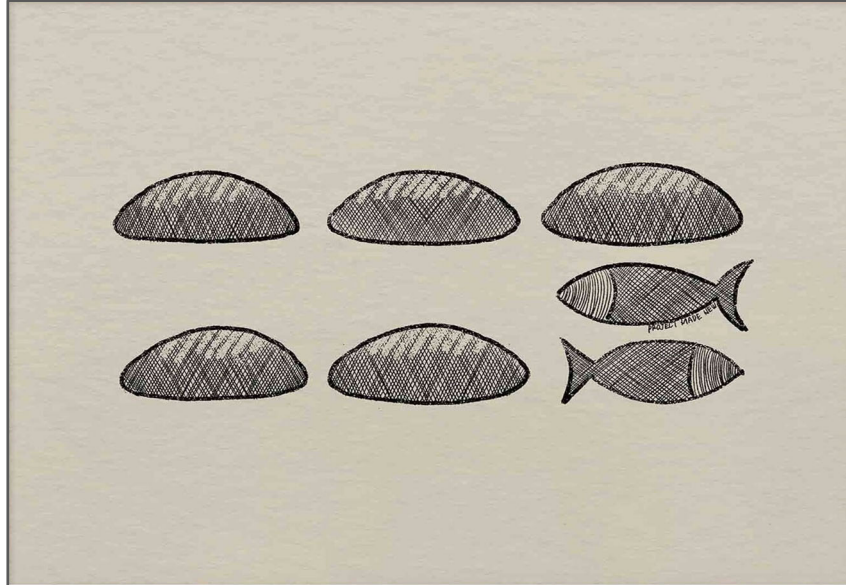


5+2 = 5000+

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



Prayer of Illumination

Since we do not live by bread alone,
but by every word that proceeds from your mouth, O God,
help us hunger for this heavenly food,
that it may nourish us today in the ways of eternal life;
through Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven.
Amen.

Scripture: John 6:1-14 (NRSVue)

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias.² A large crowd kept following him because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick.³ Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples.⁴ Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near.⁵ When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?"⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do.⁷ Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little."⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him,⁹ "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?"¹⁰ Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was

a great deal of grass in the place, so they^[b] sat down, about five thousand in all. ¹¹ Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." ¹³ So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – 5+2 = 5000+



Five Loaves. Two fish.

Bread and fish have literal AND figurative meanings in Scripture. First, bread.

Bread has been the staple of society for over 6,000 years—at least until gluten reared its ugly head. Bread was an everyday need in Jesus' time. It represents life, sustenance, nourishment. Bread fills us up. "Give us this day our daily Bread."

Yet also, God says that men and women shall not live by *what* alone?... Bread.

Metaphorically, bread is a symbol of:

- God's sustenance and sovereignty,
- God's providence and protection,
- God's gifts and grace.

Bread from heaven—manna—was miraculously provided by God during the Exodus under Moses' leadership as the Hebrews waited for the Land of Promise.

Bread from heaven—the miraculously multiplied bread of Jesus—is a messianic symbol of God's restoration and promise. This bread from above is a sign that someone greater than Moses is here. Jesus is the New Moses who provides Living Bread.

Bread nourishes community, creates a social bond. Bread is where we get the word companions. Compañeros. Those with whom we “eat bread together.” That is what we are.

Jesus worked his miracle with not only bread, but with fish. Fish in the Hebrew Scriptures represent the Jewish people themselves. The rabbis had a saying: “The people who have a thirst for the Torah will be as little fishes.” Here in our passage, fish represent Jesus’ multiplying his followers. Jesus tells the disciples that he will make them fishers of men and women.

The fish is a creature of the water. We, the people of God, all come from the water—we’re spiritually reborn in our baptismal waters. Fish can’t live without water. A follower without the Torah, the Scriptures, is like a fish out of water. We’re spiritually hydrated by our baptismal waters.

The *ichthus*, the Greek word for fish, was an ancient secret symbol identifying Christians. When the five-thousand finished eating, Jesus’ disciples gathered up 12 remaining baskets of bread. In all Jewish festivals, leftovers were gathered and given to servants. Nothing was wasted. Jesus was doing the same.

Twelve is also the number of loaves put out for the Bread of Presence at the temple. Twelve tribes of Israel. Twelve Disciples making up the New Israel. Jesus cares about both literal food and spiritual food.

Jesus fed the hungry with bread. This miracle of feeding the 5000 is the only miracle that’s found in all four gospels. In fact, Matthew and Mark mention this miracle two times in their books. This is the most defining and symbolically rich of the miracles that Jesus performed. I dare say, the times we’re most Christlike are when we’re at home or in the Witherspoon kitchen spreading margarine on hamburger buns and slapping on the bologna and cheese for Casa Maria. Or when we’re bringing in food to the food bank or volunteering at the Haven Totes food bank.

We also need to remember Jesus feeds us with spiritual food—living bread. We must never forget this. Through the Spirit of God—Jesus feeds our souls with the knowledge and love of God, sustaining our faith, and giving us salvation and abundant life.

Like Christ, with Christ in us, we feed the world—both physical hunger and spiritual hunger. Even though these crowds were an interruption and an inconvenience and Jesus was tired—he still had compassion on them. This inspires us to slow down and see the sacredness of our schedule interruptions. Like Jesus, we need to “look up” rather than “look down” on others.

“You give them something to eat.” Jesus doesn’t want to do it alone. He could. But he doesn’t. Jesus works in us and through us. Jesus took the crowds seriously. Jesus took the little boy seriously. He took the child’s five loaves and two fish seriously. The good news is that Jesus takes us and what we have seriously, too, even if it isn’t all that much.

The same spiritual principle is at work in our giving. In this season of stewardship as we plan for ministry and mission at Immanuel in 2024, Jesus is asking for your help, your involvement. “Give to me of what you have.” Give to my work at Immanuel and Tucson. Jesus will graciously receive

your gifts and multiply them for the work God has called us to. "You give them something to eat."

Barley bread was the cheapest of bread—barley was more for feeding beasts than feeding humans. And the fish were likely the size of a sardine—and it was either pickled or dried, straight from the tin can. Ummm, um!

Yet Jesus says these wonderful 5 words:

BRING THEM HERE TO ME

Jesus is still speaking and saying today, "bring me what you have."

- a. When you don't have squat—Jesus says bring your squat to me.
- b. When you feel unimportant, used up, forgotten—Jesus invites us to bring our very selves to him—and see the transformation.
- c. When your marriage is falling apart—Jesus says "bring it to me"—bring the tatters of your relationship to me—let me restore it.
- d. When the money is tight, but you want to give to God—Jesus says, "bring your meager resources to me—and I will multiply them.
- e. When your faith is small—just the size of a mustard seed—give it to Jesus and he'll move mountains with it.

Little is much in the hands of Jesus. However little or insignificant it is—Christ can multiply it and mightily use you and it in his service. This is the good news: God takes our limited resources and uses them for unlimited possibilities. With Jesus, what you have and what you are is perfectly imperfect. Like the disciple Philip, we've got to stop fixating on our lack, limitations, and littleness, and instead look up to Jesus and see the possibility and the potential his miracle-working power provides.

Give God your ordinary and watch him make it extraordinary.



We read that Jesus gave thanks as he broke the bread. The Greek word is *eucharisteo*. That's where we get the word eucharist—holy communion. Jesus probably prayed this ancient Jewish prayer: *Blessed are you, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who brings forth bread from bread.*

And that's exactly what happened. Bread from bread from bread from bread from bread was brought forth. A miracle. All ate and were satisfied. With Jesus there's more than enough to go around.



We don't have to worry about the spiritual cupboards being bare. They keep filling up. There's more than enough room at the Lord's dinner table, too. Christ can feed so many more than we think. With Jesus, the more the merrier. The Messiah's mathematics are not zero-based: which means the more you give, the less you have.

Rather, the Messiah's math is eternity-based: The more you give, the more there is to go around. The more you give away, the more you get.

5+2 = 5000+

In Jesus' geometry, you can't possess what you don't give away. This was Jesus' moment. He was poised to make it to the big time. The people had it all planned out. They had his own leather sandal line ready. A book deal was being discussed. What did Jesus do? He saved leftovers for those who weren't even able to make it. Instead of advancing himself, he was mindful of those who are not here. Those who are not yet here. Then, he slipped away from the crowds. Yes, Jesus was king. But not of this world. And not in their way and in their time.

Immanuel, we're Christians—"little Christs." We have a calling and a responsibility to continue Christ's ministry in the world. To let him work through us. Christ has blessed us to be a blessing. Christ, the Bread of Life, feeds us. Let's also take this blessed Bread of Heaven to a hungry world, in Christ's name.

Amen.

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