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Sermon 4 July 2021

Title: Food for Thought 5 (Enough with Leftovers)

- Good morning church—it is a blessing to be with you on this beautiful Sunday morning and we are so glad that you have joined LargsNaz online today—whether you are watching while enjoying your meal at our Sunday Brunch here in Largs or from your own home or from one of so many other places all around the globe, we welcome you---and wherever you are, we are glad that you are here with us.
- This is the fifth Sunday—the penultimate Sunday-- in our “Food for Thought” sermon series—there’s just one Sunday left--and we have been looking for the past 5 weeks at scriptures from the Old and New Testaments in which food plays a particularly important role.
- We’ve looked at the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, at manna and quail in the wilderness on the way to the promised land, at grain plucked on the Sabbath by Jesus’ disciples, and last week we thought about the bread that Jesus didn’t miraculously turn some stones into, even though he was starving during his time of trial and temptation in another wilderness.
- Today we’re going to consider another narrative that involves Jesus and his disciples—and like Jesus was last week, we find them today in a place where food is scarce, but a place where there are hungry people nonetheless—a huge crowd of hungry people—and so there’s a problem that arises that requires a

solution—a need to be met—because today we’re going to be looking at the familiar narrative that is so often referred to as “the feeding of the 5000.”

- You know when Pastor Tasha and I first began planning this series—Food for Thought--a sermon series that looks at scriptures in which food is a particularly significant element—we knew that there were many scriptures that we could choose from—far more than we could get to in just 6 sermons
- And so we asked ourselves, “well, which ones are the scriptures that we NEED TO include? The ones that we just absolutely couldn’t do without?” And of course we immediately thought of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden—I mean that’s where it all begins, so you’ve got to mention that—and of course the manna in the wilderness—that’s all about God providing food where there was none—gotta have that one--but then the third story that came to mind as indispensable and necessary was the miracle of the feeding of the 5000—no discussion of food in the Bible, however limited your time, could leave that narrative out—it NEEDED to be included or the series would be lacking an essential component
- And that sentiment, the idea that the story of the feeding of the 5000 is an essential element is one that is shared by all four gospel writers—because even though the four gospels differ in style and content, sometimes dramatically—all four gospel writers, Mark, Matthew, Luke and even John, decided that they could not write the gospel—that they could not sufficiently tell the story of Jesus of Nazareth without including the feeding of the 5000

- I like to imagine that each of the gospel writers sort of asked themselves what details they needed to include when they wrote their gospels—I know that’s over-simplifying a bit, but it works for me—so Matthew and Luke include the story of the birth of Jesus, while Mark left that out completely because he’s in a hurry to get to the crucial facts of Jesus’ ministry, and John includes this stuff about Jesus being the Word who was in the very beginning at creation, and Matthew tells us about the wise men, and maybe Luke thought that Matthew didn’t tell us enough about Mary, so he includes more of her—but of all the things the gospel writers—all four of them—decide to tell us or not tell us about, every one of them decided that the feeding of the 5000 was essential—
- in fact, this story about the feeding of a multitude is so important for their readers to know about, that Matthew and Mark also include details of its happening a second time in the story of the feeding of the 4000, which is essentially the same narrative, but Matthew and Mark consider it a miracle so nice Jesus performs it twice—now Jesus might have done the same thing 2 or 3 or half a dozen other times, but the gospel writers can’t tell us everything that happens every single one of the some 1000 days of Jesus’ earthly ministry—but Matthew and Mark feel the need to tell us TWICE about the feeding of a multitude—
- and of course there are different details like the number of loaves and different symbolic meanings in the 12 baskets of leftovers and such, but the point I don’t want you to miss is that even Mark, who writes the shortest gospel of all of them, and who doesn’t consider details like the birth of Jesus, or really even the

ascension, as crucial to the urgent point he is trying to make, that Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified is the Messiah, even Mark's very brief and succinct gospel includes the feeding of a multitude not once, but twice.

- And so just the fact that this is a story that is told by every gospel writer should give us an indication that there is something important going on here
- And while there's certainly more going on than we could adequately cover in a single sermon, I'd like to suggest just a few points that I believe the Holy Spirit has prompted me to share with you this morning. We're looking at Mark's gospel, in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter—and I want us to walk through this passage just a few verses at a time and to allow their meaning and God's message to speak to us as we do. You can follow along in your Bible or in the listening guide—I'm using the NRSV translation.
- As we work through these scriptures we will see that this is not just a story about the meeting of a crowd's need for food—though it certainly is that and that's the most obvious need that is met—but we will see that there are many NEEDS that arise as this narrative progresses—as the story unfolds—
- And the first NEED that we find here in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of Mark, beginning with verse 30 is a need for rest. The disciples need to rest.
- Mark has told us just a few verses before here in chapter 6 that Jesus has sent the disciples out—up in verse 7 he sends them out into the villages to teach and heal and cast out demons and proclaim that all should repent—and they are causing such a stir that Herod thinks that John the Baptist has been resurrected—even

though he knows that he had broken his body into pieces and served his head up like food on a platter at a dinner party

- And now in verse 30 the disciples have returned and they're eager to tell Jesus all about what they've done—they'd like to sit down to a meal with him and just recount all they've accomplished—but verse 31 tells us that there was so much commotion and people coming and going that they couldn't even find time to eat and so Jesus says "let's get in a boat and go to a deserted place where you can rest—because you need it." Jesus sees their need and says "take a rest" before you get burned out.
- And so they get in a boat and head off to a solitary place—through the water and into the wilderness (we've seen that before)—but Mark tells us that meanwhile the crowds have seen them leave—and this place that Jesus and his disciples are going is located sort of like Wemyss Bay is in relation to Largs—you can get there by boat but you can also get there by land—and so these crowds of people go on foot via the land route and they get there before Jesus and the disciples.
- Verse 34 tells us that as Jesus comes ashore he sees this great crowd, and the NRSV says Jesus had "compassion" for them—the Greek there is *splagchnizomai*—it's where we get the English word "splanchnic" which means relating to the abdominal organs—we talk about the splanchnic nerves in medicine—so literally this means Jesus felt for this crowd "in his guts"—he had a "gut feeling" about them and is moved because they are like sheep without a shepherd—that is, and here's the need—they are IN NEED of guidance—they are IN NEED of teaching—they need a shepherd—and so Jesus begins to teach

them—and Mark tells us that Jesus teaches this crowd many things—and apparently he does that for a considerable time because as he’s teaching time passes and it gets late.

- Verses 35 and 36 tell us that when it had gotten late, the disciples come to Jesus and tell him what they think he needs to do. Their words are in quotation marks here: They say “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; 36 send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.”
- Now maybe the disciples have been on their own too long—maybe they’ve gotten a taste of authority and power while they were out in those villages casting out demons and healing and preaching and whatnot, but notice that the disciples don’t come to Jesus and say “Lord, it’s late and these people must be hungry, can you help them?” nor do they say “Lord, what would you have us do?”
- What they do is to say to Jesus—to Jesus, now—“it’s late—you need to send these folks away so they can buy something to eat.”
- Have you ever heard of anybody telling the Lord what He ought to do? Maybe you’ve done it yourself—sometimes we may think we need to let God know what he needs to do—when we see people in need all around us, it can be a great temptation—it can even seem like a good idea to say to the Lord—tell these people to go somewhere and purchase what they need—help them find what they’re looking for—someplace else, Lord—send them where they need to go—but maybe they don’t need to go anywhere

- Now remember that the disciples had thought that they were gonna get a little break, a little rest away from the crowd—that was the plan until this crowd showed up and Jesus had compassion for them—but you know sometimes people—sometimes people who are searching for Jesus—people who are lost and trying to get to where Jesus is—people who are in need—sometimes people are gonna get in the way of the plans of Jesus’ disciples—
- These are the same disciples who have been healing and casting out demons and preaching and teaching with great success—but now when there is a need—a great need—a huge crowd who is hungry, the disciples tell Jesus to send them away because it’s late—no doubt they are still tired—they didn’t get the rest they were hoping for—and they haven’t had a chance to let Jesus know about all the things they did and said when they were on their own—after Jesus had sent them away into the villages and towns—when they got back there was too much commotion, you remember—so now maybe they’re hoping for a little private time to let Jesus know what they’ve been up to---or maybe they just want some sleep—but what the disciples tell Jesus he NEEDS to do is to send these folks away—away from the presence of Jesus that they’ve gone out of their way to be in—away from the Shepherd, the healer, the teacher that they need, away from the one who has been feeding their minds and their spirits with His teaching from daytime into the night—send them away so that they can BUY some food—
- You know what Jesus is going to say, and Jesus’ response to His disciples is the crux of these verses—verse 37: “But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.”

- The New International Version refers to this whole story we're discussing as "Jesus Feeds the 5000," and I've heard others refer to it this way as well—but that's not really accurate because even though Jesus is present, and Jesus' presence is essential to the feeding of the 5000—it's not just Jesus who does the feeding—when the disciples mention this need to Jesus—this need that the crowd has for something to eat—Jesus doesn't send the crowd away from his presence to fend for themselves as the disciples suggest—but Jesus also doesn't say, "Well, let me just wave my magic wand and make their hunger disappear—just let me say the magic words and create a great feast out of thin air for you"—no, he tells the disciples, "You give them something to eat." You do it. You take care of it.
- But that's not what the disciples asked for—what they told Jesus to do was to get rid of these needy folks—to send them on their way so they could take care of themselves—they wanted them out of their sight—they wanted to send them to somebody else to supply their needs—but Jesus says, "You do it."
- Have we ever gone to the Lord and said, "Lord, there's so many needy people—so much poverty and hunger and injustice and sickness and loneliness all around us—Lord won't you send them somewhere that they can get what they need? Help them find sustenance and healing and understanding and fellowship and assistance—somewhere else, Lord"---this is what the disciples are saying to Jesus, and he answers them with "You give them something to eat."
- Sometimes we also hear those popular celebrity critics of religion—professional atheists I like to call them—and they'll say things like "How can I believe in a God



who allows poverty and hunger and injustice and oppression and inequality?” when the truth of the matter is that it’s people who are allowing those very things—people who have created those needs and people who perpetuate those needs—and it’s people who say “Why doesn’t God do something about this? Why doesn’t he do something about those who are in need, those who are suffering”—when in fact God is asking us the same thing—why don’t you do something about it?—the truth is that if we just followed half of the greatest commandment, if we just all loved our neighbours as ourselves we wouldn’t have poverty and hunger and injustice—needs would be met—but the only way to follow that half of the commandment is to follow the first half—to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and so many don’t wanna do that—we’d rather just say, “Lord, get rid of these needy people—send them away—let them get what they need somewhere else.”

- But Jesus says to His disciples “You give them something to eat.” You know sometimes Jesus tells his disciples to rest and sometimes He tells them to serve. And here Jesus’ disciples need to be challenged—they need to be empowered—they need to be commanded to meet the needs of these who are lost and hungry. And when we bring those in need to God’s attention, we need to be ready to be challenged and empowered and commanded, to meet those needs.
- Now, the reason the disciples need to be commanded is because of the way they’re thinking—they seem to have forgotten what they had been sent out to do—to bring transformation through the power of Jesus—but listen to where their minds are now—when Jesus tells them to feed this crowd, verse 37 tells us

that the disciples said to Him, “Are we to go and buy 200 day’s wages worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?”

- You want US to give them something to eat? Do you have any idea what that’s going to cost?
- Their minds go straight to the money—and it was already there because they had suggested that the crowd go into the nearby towns and BUY food—their minds are on the money and money’s on their minds—and they are not going to see clearly as long as cash is keeping them preoccupied—
- What does their response tell us about their understanding of what source provides for them—and for this crowd? They are seeing the world’s economy—the marketplace—as the source by which their needs might be met—and what they need is to stop operating within the world’s system of exchange—seeing the world as their provider—they’re thinking about currency—the man-made system of exchanging wealth—and they’re suggesting that the amount of money that it will cost to meet a need might prevent or obstruct their ability to meet that need—as if a trivial thing like money makes any difference to the God of the universe
- They need to remember that they are engaged in conversation with the very one who not only holds the wealth of the world in His hands, but they are standing before the one through whom all of creation was formed and He is telling them “you give them something to eat.” And when God tells his disciples to do something—money is not going to hinder them.

- And so Jesus doesn't ask them how much money they have—he says in verse 38 “How many loaves do you have?” and He doesn't wait for an answer—he says “go and see” because the disciples need to take an inventory—they need to see what they and the crowd have to work with—not what they can scrounge together to sell for a profit or exchange for something better, but the disciples find out exactly what they have—5 loaves and two fish; not much really—food is pretty scarce—and verse 41 says they give it to Jesus and Jesus takes it—because they need to not only take an inventory to find out what they have but once they know, they NEED to give it all to Jesus—not saying “well, this is all we have,” but “Lord, this is ALL we have.” They give it all to Jesus. Every bit of it.
- Meanwhile Jesus has been telling the crowd to sit down in groups because they NEED to get organised—they need to join together not as a bunch of solitary individuals but as communities, as teams, as families—
- and having taken the loaves and fishes what does Jesus do?—verse 41 tells us he looks up to heaven and blesses the food—He looks up to Heaven because he NEEDS to acknowledge the source that provides for them—and then he says the blessing—the Greek there is *eulogeo*—that's where we get the English word “eulogy,”—he gives thanks and praise for what they have and then he breaks it and gives it to his disciples, because they NEED to get involved—they NEED to be a part of this feast—and of course Mark is foreshadowing the way that Jesus own body will be broken and given to his disciples and followers, providing life everlasting

- And finally verse 42 tells us that all ate and were filled and there were 12 baskets of broken pieces left over—those 12 baskets remind us of the 12 disciples who are filled with the bread of life and will continue to offer it to others but they also indicate that what was offered to Jesus—when all that these folks had was given up to the Lord and blessed by Him, scarcity was transformed into abundance.
- Now in this series we have seen Adam and Eve, who had everything they needed, look at it and see only what they lacked—they turned abundance into scarcity—we saw how some of the Hebrew people looked at the manna from heaven with which they were fed and only saw the meat that they didn't have—they turned abundance into scarcity—we saw how the Pharisees wanted to prevent the disciples from plucking grain in that corn field just because it was the Sabbath—they tried to turn abundance into scarcity—but in today's scripture we see how Jesus, who has passed through the water with his disciples and come to this wilderness to find a hungry crowd who need bread—turns scarcity into abundance—turns not much into more than enough—turns 5 loaves and 2 fish into 12 baskets leftover—
- And Mark makes sure to give us the details—not only that there were 12 baskets leftover but that there were 5000 men in the crowd—because these details need to be remembered—he needs to tell the story—because we need to be reminded—we need to be reminded that Jesus brings abundance from scarcity—

- And I believe that's one of the reasons that just 2 chapters later in Mark's gospel—in chapter 8, there's again a great crowd for whom Jesus has compassion and who need some food—and there we find that the disciples ask Jesus “How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?”
- Now you'd think that the disciples who saw the 5000 fed—who were a part of it would remember such a miraculous provision—but no, they need to be reminded—once again they need to take inventory and give what they have, even though it's not much, give it to Jesus who blesses it and transforms it into more than enough-- with basketsful left over
- And I have a feeling that we are a lot like the disciples—even though many of us have seen miraculous provision many times in our lives—we may forget and need to be reminded every now and then
- And church I just believe that we need to be reminded this morning that even though there are great needs around us—there are those who hunger physically, mentally, spiritually, emotionally—we are called not to ask the Lord to send them someplace else but we are called to give them something to eat—we are challenged and empowered and commanded—we're called to take inventory and to give what we have Jesus—to get organised and get involved—and if we will heed the call to say to Jesus “this is ALL we've got” Jesus will take it and bless it and break it and it will be more than enough—it will be enough-- with leftovers.