



THE
PLYMOUTH PULPIT

watch the sermons | plymouthchurch.org

“All You Need”

Matthew 14:13-21

Brett Younger
Senior Minister

June 4, 2023

Now when Jesus heard about the murder of John the Baptist, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.

When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late. Send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves."

Jesus said to them, "They need not go away. You give them something to eat."

They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish."

And he said, "Bring them here to me."

Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Matthew 14:13-21

Our hometown has some of the world's most attractive, famous, and expensive restaurants. We also have mom-and-pop diners that are not attractive, famous, or that expensive, but the food is good. We have

interesting restaurants you may not know about and want to put on your list for when you need something out of the ordinary. If you want something different, New York excels at different.

The Black Ant is an unusual, hip East Village Mexican restaurant that offers food covered with insects. They serve an appetizer of black ant guacamole and an entrée of grasshopper-crusting shrimp. Some of us have eaten in restaurants where the insects are free.

Camaje Bistro Dining in the Dark is known for its "Dinner in the Dark," which is held twice a month. When diners arrive, they are blindfolded. Only after you have finished your meal do they tell you what you have eaten. Some of us have eaten in restaurants where a blindfold would have been helpful.

Ninja New York is a medieval Japanese eatery. Warriors appear out of hidden doors and disappear in plumes of smoke. They scare you, and then take your order. Some of us have been frightened by waiters who did not have swords.

The Trailer Park Lounge is deliberately tacky. The most popular item on the menu is their tater tots. The dining area is filled with lit-up Santas, mannequins, and flamingos. I feel like I have eaten there once in Alabama.

Sik Gaek is known for serving live octopus, squirming, writhing just-caught seafood where its nervous system continues to function as it is being served. Nothing is well-done.

The customers are not going to these restaurants for the food. People who wear blindfolds and have to look out for ninjas want something more than a nutritious meal—an experience, an adventure, or something nostalgic—tater tots. Maybe they go to part of a community, a peculiar community. Something other than food is happening.

Something else is going on at every meal. There is something sacred about dirt, rain, sunshine, plants, animals, farmers, harvesters, packagers, transporters, grocers, and cooks. There is something sacred about eating a meal with someone we love. A meal invites us to reverence for the earth, an appreciation of sustenance, and a deepened connection with those with whom we share the table.

For most of us, the most sacred room in our homes is the kitchen. There is a reason we pray before meals more than any other time, and a reason churches have potluck dinners. The way we eat is the way we live. How we eat is who we are. The sacred within us understands the sanctity of a shared meal. We are hungry for something beyond the food we share.

10,000 people are following Jesus around the country. His compassion is the magnet that draws this huge crowd to this lonely beach. They are following Jesus because they want the hope he is sharing.

Jesus heals and teaches, and as it gets on toward evening, the disciples say, “It’s great that you helped all these people, but it’s after six. It’s quitting time. You need to send them on their way.”

Jesus surprises them, “They don’t need to leave. You feed them. What have you got?”

The disciples are incredulous: “Look at how many people are here. All we have are five loaves and two fish. What good is that going to do?”

They call them loaves, but they are the size of rolls, and they are barley, cheaper than wheat. They are not even good rolls.

Jesus takes the loaves and fish, blesses, breaks, and gives it to the disciples to give to the congregation. It is not enough. It is more than enough.

This is more than a story of free fast food. Even the people who are there are not sure what happened. We tend to see it as a magic trick, laugh it off, and try to come up with a rational explanation. One theory is that the crowd was motivated by seeing others’ generosity and decided to share the food they had hidden for themselves. The point of the story is the importance of sharing, but this story is not about magic or a sweet little lesson.

This story about Jesus feeding the crowd is one of only a few that is recorded in all four Gospels. The Good Samaritan, the prodigal son, the water into wine, the woman at the well, Mary and Martha, and the raising of Lazarus only make it into one Gospel. Matthew and Mark tell this story twice. The church told and retold this story. They believed we need to hear this story.

In John’s version, Jesus says, “I am the bread of life, the one who comes to me will not hunger.”

This miracle that happened once in “a lonely place” became a miracle that happens again and again in a million places. Notice the words Matthew uses. Jesus takes the loaves, blesses, breaks, and gives them to the disciples. The verbs “take,” “bless,” “break” and “give” are the same ones in the same order as at the Last Supper.

The verb for giving thanks is eucharistéo—the word from which we get the name Eucharist for the Lord’s Supper. This is communion. Jesus offers hungry people more than food. He invites us to God’s Table.

Though most of us look well-fed, every one of us has a hunger, a sense that something is missing. We do not have the words to describe it, but we try to fill that hunger with houses, spouses, and careers. If we were not hungry, then not only would pretzel carts be out of business, but so would self-help podcasters, plastic surgeons, Lexus dealers, online dating services, and the Lottery Commission.

Most of us know the feeling of a midlife crisis that shows up early and stays late. We are standing in front of the refrigerator, knowing we want something, but not sure what it is. We feel empty even when we have everything we thought we needed. We are, at the deepest level of our being, longing for more. This desire that never completely goes away is a gift from God.

We are at church today, because we are hungry. If you turn to the person next to you and ask, “Are you here because you hunger for God?” they may smile nervously, “No, I couldn’t get a tee time.”

Ask a guest, "Are you hungry for the grace of God?"
"We were just passing by. We'd always seen this church.
We figured, well, we have nothing better to do this."

It is hard to admit that we long for something we cannot identify. Is it faith we are hungry for? Is it hope? Is it love? Is it a sense of belonging? Is it community? Is it God?

At the heart of it, we come to church because we have heard a rumor of a God who feeds the hungry and fills the soul. We are looking for that for which we long. Our hunger leads us to this table, the promise of home, and the heavenly banquet. Far more than 5000 will come to the table today. All around the world hungry people share this gift.

Ordinary bread made by ordinary people is holy when we take and eat and remember. Ordinary grapes taken by ordinary people and made into ordinary wine are holy when we hold the cup to our lips and drink and remember. We come to this table not because we have figured it out, feeling like we are fulfilled, but because in our emptiness we need God's love. We come not to express an opinion, but to seek a presence and pray for a spirit. We come to this table, as sisters and brothers, that we might again know that God has invited us to live in God's love.

In this bread and cup, God gives strength, because we get discouraged. God gives generosity, because we get used to thinking only of ourselves. God gives love, because we want to be loved. We will be hungry, even after this meal, but we will have tasted the goodness of a day when

there will be no more longing. At this table, God takes our hunger, blesses it, and gives us hope.

sermon © Brett Younger

