

# Drops in the Bucket

*Sermon for Sabbath before Thanksgiving, Oct. 6, 2018*

Thanksgiving is just around the corner. Are you ready? Have you finished grocery shopping? Do you have hordes of family descending on your home? Is your menu decided? The house clean?

What about in your heart? Are you ready? Have you paused yet to reflect on what you have to be grateful for? Or have you been too busy in the rush of preparation?

If you haven't had a spare moment to reflect, you wouldn't be alone. I think many, if not most of us, are in the same boat as you. Life moves fast and is so full of demands. It's hard to remember to pause, to reflect, to say thanks from a place of gratitude rather than duty.

The vision of the Thanksgiving meal is a peaceful, happy family gathered around an exquisitely set table laden with the bounty of harvest. Heads are bowed, hearts are attuned, as the head of the family says grace. Perhaps your own family's picture is not too different from that, perhaps it's the complete opposite.

But today, I want to paint a picture of a different kind of thanksgiving meal. It was a large one. Over five thousand people, in fact. It didn't take place in the wild north places of Nunavut in 1578 on Frobisher Bay. It didn't involve the French settlers in 1604. It didn't even include the Pilgrims and Native Americans in 1628. This meal was thousands of years before natives and strangers broke bread together. It was on a hillside in Galilee, far from towns, farms, or even simple dwellings.

I'm sure you have all guessed the story by now. The feeding of the five thousand. It's a familiar one. Perhaps it's so familiar we've lost the

wonder of it. We know the plot. There are no surprises. But it is truly an extraordinary story! Sometimes, by looking at a familiar story through a different character's eyes, we can rekindle a bit of its wonder. Let's experience this story through the eyes of the unnamed boy who offered Jesus his barley loaves and fishes and see if we can take away some encouragement from it.

The story begins in John 6:1-3. "Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples." (NIV) Let's continue, with our imaginations awake and engaged.

The hillside rippled with the tide of humanity as it wandered upwards in its search for Jesus. The young boy clutched his satchel to him, not wanting to lose it in the throng. Perceiving the edge of the crowd, he weaved his way over and broke into a run. He was accustomed to running, even uphill, and the freedom from the crowd was exhilarating. As he neared the top, he spied the group of men that travelled with Jesus. The boy made a bee-line for them, planting himself as near as he was able, for he knew that Jesus would be nearby, too.

Ellen White offers us an insight into Jesus' response to the growing crowd. "From the hillside He looked upon the moving multitude, and His heart was stirred with sympathy. Interrupted as he was, and robbed of His rest, He was not impatient. He saw a greater necessity demanding His attention as He watched the people coming and still coming. He was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd." (*Desire of Ages*, p. 364)

The boy kept his eyes glued to the group of disciples, waiting expectantly. Soon, he saw Jesus stand up and move towards the crowd. The day proved to be unlike any the boy had ever experienced. He was certain

he would never have another like it. The words of Jesus flowed through him, penetrating his mind and sinking into his heart. He thrilled to watch the blind, the lame, the sick, and the despairing healed. Was there nothing this man could not do? He wondered.

It seemed in the blink of an eye that the day was spent. The afternoon light waned yet the people lingered. The boy's stomach grumbled for the first time. There had simply been too much excitement to feel hungry before now. His eyes searched for Jesus. If he felt hungry, Jesus must feel even hungrier. He spotted Jesus not too far away. He did, indeed, look tired, though resolved to continue helping and teaching. His disciples were speaking to him anxiously, pointing across the hills to where the boy knew there were villages. Curious, he drew closer to the conversation.

"Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" exclaimed the disciple named Philip. (John 6:7, *NIV*) The dismayed looks on the men's faces soon made the boy understand the situation. They were being asked the impossible – to feed the over five thousand people gathered on the hillside. The disciples descended into discussions of expenses and logistics.

Slung over his shoulder, the satchel seemed heavier. The boy gripped it as an impulse gripped him. There was no way his meager fare would feed five thousand. But perhaps it would feed Jesus? Or perhaps Jesus could perform another miracle – he'd been performing them all day! Or, doubt and fear whispered that he would be laughed at, treated as a silly child, and sent on his way.

Determination set his young jaw. There was only one way to find out.

Approaching the first disciple he could reach, he drew himself up to his full height and squared his thin shoulders.

"Sir," he began. "I have some food here." He held out his satchel, revealing the five loaves of barley and two small fishes. He inwardly cringed.

The loaves and fishes seemed even smaller and humbler than before.

"Maybe they can be of some use to the Master?" he asked weakly.

The disciple's brows rose in surprise then lowered in doubt. The boy could see him mentally writing off the offering as barely even a drop in the bucket of need. Impulsively, the boy thrust his satchel into the disciple's hands. "Check with the Master," he insisted in his most commanding tone. He caught a hint of amusement before the disciple turned back to the group.

"Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish," Andrew announced. The boy noticed how he emphasized the word *small*. Andrew continued, seemingly unable to prevent himself from adding, "But how far will they go among so many?" (John 6:9, *NIV*) He handed the satchel to Jesus, who peered inside.

The boy's chest squeezed with anxiety as he watched Jesus' face. He prepared himself for a patronizing smile, perhaps a pat on the head, and being sent away.

To the boy's everlasting surprise, a smile lit Jesus' face, and it was a far cry from patronizing. He looked up and straight at the boy, the joy of the gift glowing in his eyes. The boy blushed at such unspoken praise, wanting to look away, but found he couldn't. All he could do was smile.

"Have the people sit down," Jesus said, with a touch of eagerness in his voice. (John 6:10, *NIV*) As the disciples did his bidding, the boy sat down right where he was. Excitement coursed through him. Jesus had a plan! He couldn't imagine what it was, but he couldn't wait to find out.

Jesus took the loaves in his hands, gave thanks, and began passing them to his disciples. "One, two, three, four, five..." the boy counted under his breath. That should be it. But Jesus continued to pass out more loaves! "Six, seven, eight..." Soon the boy lost count. He watched in amazement as the disciples continued to distribute armloads of food to the seated groups.

His gaze swept the wilderness setting in which they were all gathered. There wasn't a village in sight, only the hillside and lake. Yet Jesus had

provided for their needs without money or shops or markets or farms. It reminded him a little of the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites and the miracle of manna from heaven. In the middle of nowhere, with no resources to hand, the people's needs had been supplied by God. The boy looked around. God had done it again. He suspected that perhaps God had never stopped to provide.

A shadow fell across the boy's view and interrupted his musings. He looked up. Andrew was standing there, smiling sheepishly as he held out some bread and fish. The boy grinned back and gratefully took the food. It seemed he wasn't the only one with much to wonder and ponder.

He looked at the bread and fish in hands. It wasn't a banquet, though he was sure Jesus could have provided that had he wanted to. It was simple, peasant food. Yet it was all he needed. He was hungry, but soon he wouldn't be. Jesus had taken care of him. He had taken care of all of them.

After the people had finished eating, the boy heard Jesus say, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." (John 6:12, *NIV*)

Leftovers? How much could be left over? The boy wondered. From his perch, he watched the disciples gather the pieces into baskets. "One, two, three, four..." The boy's eyes widened as he counted. Twelve baskets! How could it be? He spun around to see Jesus, who turned to look at him again, a glorious smile on his face. Jesus had fed them not only enough, but more than enough! More than was ever possible for them to eat. They had been hungry, far from food, and many of them without the means to buy food. And now they were full and satisfied, and surrounded by extra bounty. The boy's heart swelled as the lesson came home: *Jesus* was more than enough.

As he filled his satchel with precious leftovers to take home and share, a sweet gratitude filled him. God was able to take care of him. He was more than able, in fact. He treasured this truth in his heart, determined never to doubt it.

His satchel was truly heavy by now, weighed down by two or three times what he had begun the day with. He marveled anew. He had had so little, or so he had thought. But today, he learned that his little was indeed abundance. God was able to use his little to bless many abundantly. His humble offering, which should have elicited condescension at best and scorn at worst, was joyfully accepted and miraculously multiplied. His drop in the bucket, placed in Jesus' hands, had fed a sea of hungry people.

I don't know that our gratitude during Thanksgiving often comes close to that of the unnamed but bold and faithful boy. But that doesn't mean that we can't share in his gratitude, for we truly are recipients of the same lessons and blessings.

I'm sure many of us are acquainted with shortage and uncertainty. Whether right now we are uncertain of how to make ends meet, or we have experienced this in the past, many of us can relate to the scarcity syndrome. The fear, frustration, and powerlessness of not being able to provide are difficult to describe.

The Israelites experienced this. They entered a desert wilderness with no food or water and no survival skills. They were forced into a place of complete and utter dependence on God. And God came through for them. Time and again. They were grateful. They were ungrateful. But God remained faithful.

The people gathered on the hillside were largely peasants, also familiar with the struggle of making ends meet. Ellen White tells us that many of them did not have food nor the means to buy it. They, too, were totally dependent on God to provide. And Jesus did, miraculously feeding them beyond what they could consume. I'm sure many of them were grateful. But Ellen White mentions that some were also clamouring to make Jesus king then and there. Their ambitions and agendas clouded their minds from receiving the incredible lesson that Jesus could be trusted to provide for all their needs. They were not able to absorb the truth that Jesus himself is

sufficient for us, not only in our day to day needs but in our spiritual and eternal ones, as well.

Let us reflect on this truth today and as we approach Thanksgiving. Let us look back on our year and prayerfully count the ways that God has not abandoned us. Even if times are tough, I'm sure we can find the ways in which God holds us together and carries us through. He is enough.

And because he is enough, we need not be slaves to scarcity. We need not look at our little in fear. We need not feel that because we have so little we cannot make a difference, that our lives are useless, that we are not needed.

Just the like the unnamed boy with his laughably little amount of food, when our little is placed in God's hands, there is no telling or imagining what he can do with it. Our drops in the bucket miraculously become tidal waves of change and blessing, when they are placed at God's disposal. It is truly from a place of great abundance that we can reach into our hearts, our time, our wallets and give to those in need. The abundance may not come from us, but God abundantly blesses what we give.

The ministry of ADRA is made possible through the many drops that are entrusted to it. On average, by the grace and provision of God, ADRA has been able to increase those drops up to ten times. Of course, the purpose of ADRA's ministry is not merely to increase funds. The purpose of ADRA's ministry is to bless others in their times of greatest need, whether in the midst of a conflict, after a disaster, or in the quiet daily struggle of poverty and sickness. And this work is made possible only by your gifts. This Thanksgiving, ADRA is deeply grateful for you.

I hope, as we pause to reflect on God's provisions and his blessings in the last year, we can be encouraged and empowered like the unnamed boy. May we no longer doubt God's goodness and ability as we try to tally up his countless blessings. May we no longer be tempted to bottle those blessings

up for ourselves for fear of scarcity, but remember that we are in possession of great abundance because our God is with us, and he possesses all things.

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness...Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.  
(Colossians 2:6-7, Colossians 3:15-17, *NIV*)

