

## **“Who Is Your Favorite Television Chef?”**

**John 6:1-14**

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Frankfort, Kentucky

July 29, 2012

The Food Network is hot! Some of the most popular programs on television are cooking shows, and these are not your grandmother’s cooking shows. We have come a long way since the days of Julia Childs.

While cooking shows would not be my first choice if I were going to watch television, I have seen my share of them because I am married to someone who enjoys them. I am amazed at how the contestants can prepare dishes so quickly without knowing ahead of time what meats and vegetables they will have to work with in order to prepare those award winning dishes. Those kitchens turn into large pressure cookers, that’s for sure.

Jesus probably felt some pressure and had to do some quick thinking the day over five thousand showed up for dinner. It wasn’t until Andrew unfolded the napkin in a little boy’s lunch to reveal five barley loaves and two small fish that Jesus knew what he had to work with that afternoon.

I’m confident you know this story. Jesus and his disciples had gone to what they thought would be a secluded place around the Sea of Galilee to get some rest. The demands of the people were already taking a toll on them, and they needed some time alone to replenish their strength.

People came looking for them, however, and walked along the shore until they found them. Jesus could not turn them away and continued teaching late into the afternoon.

As the day drew to a close, Jesus knew the people were hungry. He singled Philip out and asked him where food could be found to feed the masses. After all, Philip was from that area and would know about the marketplace.

It is obvious from Philip's response that he was shocked and confused and in no mood to order take-out. "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little," he replied, and he was right.

I cannot be too hard on Philip. I am fairly certain I would have said the same thing.

You know what happened next. Andrew brought a little boy to Jesus who was willing to hand over his lunch, which consisted of five loaves of barley bread and two fish. Andrew had no idea how this meager amount could be used to feed this large crowd of hungry people, but that did not keep him from presenting it to Jesus. At least it was something to work with, as futile as it seemed.

Jesus instructed the people to sit on the grass in groups of fifty, and after they did, he blessed the boy's lunch. No doubt he thanked God for this little boy's generosity and asked God to use it to feed His hungry children, which God did. Before long, everyone had eaten, and there was food leftover.

So impressed were the people that day, they said of Jesus, "Surely, this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."

This is one of the most familiar stories in scripture, but also one of the most important. Why else would it be included in all four gospels? Evidently, those who wrote and compiled the gospels felt it conveyed a message they did not want overlooked.

What do you think that message is? I gave this a lot of thought last week, and here's what I came up with.

**What are the two most striking features of this story?** For me, it is the size of the crowd, over five thousand people, and the size of that little boy's lunch, five barley loaves and two fish. In the words of Apollo 13 Flight Commander, Jim Lovell, "Houston, we have a problem!"

**When was the last time you faced a challenge so big it almost paralyzed you?** Did you throw your hands up in the air and walk away? Did you find a way forward? What did you learn from that experience?

**What do you think Jesus wanted Philip and his disciples to do?** I think he wanted them to hit this problem head on and figure out a way to feed these hungry people. Why?

Meeting the needs of people was his greatest priority. This was his mission and his purpose for living. It is why he spent his public ministry walking the dusty trails rubbing shoulders with real people.

Jesus also knew this would not be the last time the disciples would face such a daunting challenge as they walked those same roads. Often, they would be overwhelmed by the number of people needing help, yet they would need to respond out of compassion just as Jesus did.

**What did the disciples want to do?** They made that very clear. “Send the people away,” they told Jesus.

**Why did they say this?** They were exhausted. Remember, this was supposed to be a quiet retreat for them after returning from their first mission trip. They came to this remote section on the shores of the Sea of Galilee to rest and replenish their bodies and spirits. They had been with these people all day. Now, it was their time.

Besides, there was no way they could feed this many people. As Philip reminded Jesus, even if he knew where to purchase food, they did not have enough money to buy the amount that would be needed to feed everyone.

Was it too much for them to ask Jesus to send the hungry crowd away? Evidently Jesus thought it was!

**Can you identify with Philip and the disciples?** What challenge are you facing today which has stopped you in your tracks? Are you to the point you are ready to throw your hands up in the air and walk away?

Before you do, let this story speak to you. And what does it say? **People of faith tackle the problems others give up on.** They always have. They always must. This includes their own problems and those of others.

**How do you do this?** According to this story, there are two things you must do.

**Work with God.** This was what Jesus did when he took that little boy’s meager provisions and asked God to bless them.

When facing a big challenge, it is human nature to discount what we have and echo Andrew’s words when he looked at the loaves and fishes, “But what are they among so many people?” Rarely do we feel we have all we need to succeed, and we’re probably right.

However, when we offer God what we have and ask Him to bless it, we become a channel of blessing through which God can work. A little becomes a lot when God is in it, as an old song reminds us. Look what God did that day with just five barley loaves and two fish.

I encourage you to look in your basket this morning to see what you have. Don't get discouraged because it may be small, but rejoice you have something to offer. Give it to God, along with yourself, and allow God to use it and work through you to tackle even the biggest challenge.

Out of all the people in the crowd that day, who was the unlikeliest to be used by God to feed all those people? It had to be that little boy. We know from the contents of his lunch he came from a very poor family. Only the poorest of the poor ate barley bread. It was held in contempt by anyone able to afford better.

However, he was the one who made it possible for everyone to eat, as unlikely as that seems. What if he had not been willing to share his food? Would the people have gone home hungry?

I wonder how many turned Andrew down before he found this willing lad? How many laughed and told Andrew he had to be kidding or held tightly to what they had to insure they would have enough nourishment for the journey home.

How many times have you walked away from a problem because you felt you had too little to offer? Don't ever do that again. Offer what you have to God and ask Him to bless it. In God's eyes, there is no gift too small to matter and there is no adequate excuse for refusing to get involved.

**In addition to working with God, also work with others.** Feeding the people that day was not the result of one person's deeds, but many. A little boy offered his lunch, Andrew brought it to Jesus, the disciples helped the people to sit in groups of fifty, and they gathered up the leftovers so they would not go to waste. It is easy to see this was a collaborative effort.

The teamwork may not have stopped there, though. According to some scholars, everyone present that day may have collaborated to make this miracle happen.

Instead of Jesus miraculously multiplying the fish and loaves, is it possible Jesus used the little boy's generosity to inspire others to do the same. After all, in that culture no one left home without food if he or she was going to be gone for any length of time.

Granted, people were gone longer that day than expected because they had to travel a great distance around the lake to find Jesus and the hour was late, but many of them, like this little boy, probably had some food left. Could it be that Jesus encouraged the people to sit in small groups and place before them the food they had left? Sounds reasonable to me.

Could it also be reasonable there was actually enough food for all of them, with plenty leftover? Sure.

I know this interpretation is not as glamorous as having Jesus mass produce thousands of meals, but I think it does have merit. If this is what happened that afternoon, it could have been Jesus' most profound and unforgettable lesson of the day. What would that be? **If we share with our neighbors like we did today, no one will ever go hungry!**

It could also have been used to teach the disciples and everyone how big problems are solved, by pooling resources and working with others. When people work with God and others, all things are possible! All things! No personal or global problem is too intimidating or daunting to be solved.

**What is the biggest challenge you are facing today?** Will you apply the lessons from this familiar story to that challenge?

As a person of faith, will you roll up your sleeves and tackle life's biggest challenges instead of walking away? Will you offer God what you have and ask Him to bless it? Will you reach out to those around you and work with them? Will you share what you have with those who are struggling?

I hope you will and assure you it will make a big difference in your life and many others.