

“Big Faith”  
Matthew 14:13-21  
August 2, 2020

There are a lot of problems in our world today, and some problems appear to be too big for anyone to fix. Right now we are dealing with a worldwide pandemic. It is a part of everything we do. We read about it and discuss it with family and friends every day. Is it too big for anyone to fix? Maybe you are dealing with other problems that seem too big to fix. You have lost your job and you don't know where to turn. Maybe you have health problems that don't seem to go away, despite numerous visits to the doctor. Maybe you are in a relationship that has gone bad and is beyond repair. When we face problems that appear too big for us to fix, they can shake our faith and leave us feeling unsettled.

Today we are beginning a 5-part sermon series in which we will look 5 big problems or situations the disciples faced with Jesus that appeared to be impossible for anyone to fix. In our Gospel lesson for today we see Jesus spending time with His disciples in a remote, solitary place. People heard that Jesus was there and soon a crowd began to gather around Him. As the day went on, the crowd grew larger and larger, to the point where thousands and thousands of people were trying to see Jesus – hoping He could heal their health problems. I would guess that many of them had medical issues that appeared to be too big for anyone to handle, but not Jesus. There was no problem too big for Jesus to handle.

Then the disciples came to Jesus with a big problem. There were in the middle of nowhere and thousands of people were getting hungry, so they told Jesus, “Lord, it's the end of the day, this is a desolate place, why don't you send these people away so they can go home or to their village and get some food.” But instead of following that suggestion, Jesus makes 2 demands of His disciples, which at first glance may appear to be at odds with each other.

First, Jesus declares a call to action. He says to the disciples, “The people do not need to go away; you give them something to eat.” And the response from the shocked disciples is, “Lord, we only have 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish here,” meaning, “That's not enough food to feed us, let alone this crowd of over 5000 people.” We have nothing but 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. That was the response of the disciples and in a sense it has been our response and the response of people throughout history when they have felt overwhelmed by the problems of this world.

It is the response of the parent worried about his/her child. My child doesn't do well with online learning outside of the classroom and I only have a high school diploma. I'm not a teacher. Plus, how are we going to teach our children online at home this fall when we both have to work? So many questions and concerns as parents look at this month, hungry for answers. “What are we going to do? We only have 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish.”

It is the response of the small business owner in the face of a challenging economy. How can he compete with the big box stores that have 10,000 things to choose from online? How will he stay open during this pandemic? Will he have to lay off some of his employees? His employees have families. He is hungry for answers about how he can keep the family-owned business open. He doesn't have 10,000 of anything; instead all he has is “5 loaves of bread and 2 fish.”

It is the response of the spouse who is desperately trying to make a go of a troubled marriage, and who grows tired of being the only partner working on the relationship. Hungry for hope and a rekindling of past love, she is left thinking, “There is nothing here but 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish.”

It might be the response any of us offers when the problems of life seem too big for us to handle. In fact, sometimes in life it appears that Jesus seems to be asking more of us than we have to give as spouses, parents, workers, students, and on and on. He calls us to love, even when loving is difficult. He calls us to forgive, even when we have been wronged. And He calls us to stand firm on our principles, even when it means standing alone. Those things are not easy to do, after all, we are not Jesus – our abilities are not as powerful or unlimited as His were. We have nothing but “5 loaves of bread and 2 fish.”

Fortunately for the 12 disciples and for all of us, the story does not end with Jesus asking what seems to be impossible of the disciples, and then wandering off into the wilderness – leaving them stranded. In this small amount of food, Jesus issues His second call to action in verse 18 saying, “Bring them here to me.” Taking those 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish, Jesus looked up to heaven and said a prayer – a blessing. He then multiplied

that food, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied, with 12 baskets of food left over.

The disciples had done what they could with their limited human resources. They gathered what little food was available to them and gave it to Jesus. Jesus then asks His disciples and the crowd to trust Him – trust Him with their hunger, trust Him with their needs, and trust Him with their lives, because He will provide, He will solve problems – even when it seems impossible.

For every parent who finds themselves wondering, “Do I have what it takes to teach, train, and handle my child or children today? I may not be the best parent, but do I have what it takes to simply be adequate?” The answer is probably, “No.” We do not have what it takes. At best, in the face of all kinds of challenges, “we have nothing but 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish.” But, we do have a Savior, a loving God, who whispers in our ears, “Bring them here to me – your skills, weaknesses, strengths, and fears, bring me your children and I will make you more than adequate for the task that is before you.”

That is good news for parents in the midst of this pandemic; it is also good news for workers and business owners who are worried about the future; and it is good news for spouses in troubled marriages faced with tough decisions. “Bring what you have to me,” said Jesus – your hopes, your dreams, your convictions, your burdens, your challenges, your problems, and your responsibilities. When life gets the best of us, perhaps it is because we focus too much on how little we can do and too little on how much Jesus can do.

Jesus wanted His disciples and all of us to know that we can face the big problems in life with a big faith. Even though Jesus’ disciples had just seen Him perform several miracles of healing right before their eyes and had recently seen Him cast out demons from people and even raise a man’s daughter from the dead, they still didn’t believe Jesus could provide enough food from what little they had to feed all of these people. However, instead of criticizing them for their lack of faith, He forgave them, and provided more than enough food for everyone to eat. And Jesus does that same thing to us. He forgives us for all the times we doubt Him or we forget about Him when we are faced with big problems.

In fact, just think about the greatest problem we have in our lives – that being sin. Our sins of doubt and selfishness that offend God. But even this problem was not too big for Jesus to handle. He took our sins to the cross and paid for them by sacrificing His life. He then faced the problem of death by rising from the grave, thus changing what happens to us at the moment of our death. Because of this same Jesus, who is with us today, we can face our big problems with a big faith that He is with us, and will guide us, and will bless us in all that we do.

I’m sure the disciples never imagined themselves walking around with baskets of food, feeding thousands of people in the middle of nowhere; but with Jesus anything is possible. What about you? No problem in your life or in this world is too big for Jesus to handle. I pray that God will bless all of us with a big faith as we face this pandemic and other big problems in our lives; and may we see Jesus right there in the midst of every problem we face, knowing He is working in us and through us to bless us and to solve all of our struggles.