

**Most of us have heard this story in John's gospel all our lives. And usually we hear about how this miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes by Jesus is really the gospel of John's way of presenting to us the Eucharistic initiation of the church – which it true, but I would like to try and come at this narrative from a little different perspective today. First, did you notice the opening line in our gospel reading, because it raises a different, rather difficult issue. And if you were not paying close attention, you might have read right past it. It reads, "A large crowd followed him BECAUSE they saw the signs." And you might say, "Well of course they did, who wouldn't follow him? Look at what he did." But the real question for everybody here is – What happens to us when the miracles cease? Will we follow Jesus when there are no more signs? Will we follow when our spouse dies unexpectedly and there is no miracle of instant resurrection? Will we follow when we are diagnosed with a terminal illness and no miraculous cure appears? In short, will we follow when bad things happen to good people and there are no miracles or signs in sight to right the scales of justice? At some point in our lives, we may be forced to give up this idea of a God who comes with miracles in hand when we whistle, in favor of a God who calls his faithful to be present and available for others when the need arises. In other words, we're not just supposed to sit around wishing and longing for miracles – but rather we're supposed to, by God's grace, become the miracle. That's what following Christ means.**

**We are challenged to love Jesus for who he is, rather than for all the free bread he can give us. The bottom line is our Lord is calling us to be nothing less than the compassion and presence of God in this world. So with that in mind, rather than focusing on Christ multiplying and distributing all those fresh rolls and seafood to the large crowd, let's instead reflect on where he got the food that made this miracle a reality in the first place. There is only a brief mention of a little Jewish child who gives away everything he possesses that day. A great crowd had gathered numbering 5000 men, which really meant around 15,000 men, women and children. Jesus, like any good CEO, wants his employees to be good problem solvers. So Jesus leans over to Philip and says, "Philip, how are we going to buy enough food to feed these people?" It is a test. So Philip replies the way many of us would in that situation: "We're done for. Half a year's wages wouldn't be enough to feed all these people." It seems that only Andrew has the smarts to work the crowd looking for food. He finds our nameless Jewish child, or perhaps more accurately, the child finds him. So the boy rips out of his little pockets five thoroughly squashed slices of bread and two very suspicious looking fish. This was probably to have been the boy's own lunch. But let the record show that the kid was giving not out of his surplus, but rather was giving all that he had.**

**Now Andrew does not want to hurt the boy's feelings, so he takes the unattractive morsels over to Jesus, surely thinking to himself that his discovery is really quite irrelevant under the circumstances. But to everyone's surprise, Jesus accepts the boy's gifts with the proper ceremony and gratitude. Our Lord then invites all his many guests to draw up a seat on the grass. After giving thanks to his Father, the Master tells his disciples to share the boy's gifts among the huge crowd. They look in disbelief at the soggy bread and the convincingly dead fish. But they reluctantly do as Jesus tells them, and before very long, every belly on the field was full of fish sandwiches. Jesus took the boys squashed slices of bread and turned them into a divine Wonder-bread for all. And I have a hunch he probably winked at the child too, and gave the twelve leftover bags of food to him as a gift. In fact, I would not have been surprised at all if Jesus had held up the boy in his arms for all to see, and said something like, "Now I want all of you try to be as generous as this child was today." So the next time you are asked for something you feel you cannot give, remember this little Jewish boy and think again. Even if your gift is small and seemingly insignificant, Christ can and will make it grow. Remember the marriage feast at Cana where Jesus turned water into wine. Remember that Jesus did not make wine out of nothing, he made it out of something. And so it is the disciples' duty first to provide that basic something, which Jesus in his love will then transform, like water into wine, or multiply, like bread to feed the hungry crowd.**

**Expectant faith, therefore, does not allow us to just fold our hands doing nothing, pleadingly looking up into heaven waiting for a reply. Rather it spurs us on to make our best contribution, whatever the circumstances - our little five loaves and two fish, knowing that without it, without that basic something to work with, there would be no miracle. You don't have to worry about "is it enough?", or "is it going to work?" Its God's business what God does with it. That's why a miracle is not so much God working for us; as it is more like God working with us. So this multiplication of the loaves and the fishes, while a symbol of the Eucharistic multiplication of the bread of life that Jesus came to offer, is also a clear sign of the abundant generosity of God. That's why the church tells this story over and over again, because the Eucharist, when you get right down to it, really says it all. It is nothing less than God giving away God. And you cannot get any better than that. So the church keeps giving away the bread of Jesus saying, "This is who you are". As a Church, we are what we eat. But unfortunately there are times when our faith usually mirrors that of Philip and Andrew, who could not see past the meager five loaves and two fish. All too often we tend to base our living on our own scarcity, or sometimes even on our own fears of insufficiency. So we hoard and we save and we worry, and so not surprisingly, we end up living life in small and risk-free ways. We pull back in life when we should instead push forward. We give in to our fear of a shortfall rather than exercising faith in God's unlimited abundance.**

**Following Christ means we are constantly called to go places where we have never been, to do things that we have never attempted, and to be things that we would never have envisioned. So as we go where God would lead us, we need to remember we are called to be Eucharist for others too. It is in living in that intimate relationship with our God, that many times without our even giving it a second thought, just like that little boy in our gospel story, by God's grace, we become the miracle – we become like our Lord, who came to share instead of hoard, who came to serve and not be served.**