

BREAD ENOUGH TO GO AROUND

Scriptures: Mark 7:24-30; Mark 6:30-44

Let me tell you, being a follower of Jesus is no picnic. We actually tried to have a picnic once. The twelve of us had just gotten back from a mission trip. Jesus had sent us out across Galilee to preach the gospel, heal the sick, and cast out demons—easy stuff like that. He told us not to take any bread. He said people along the way would give us something to eat. It seemed to work, but let me tell you it was stressful, always wondering where we would get our next meal. When we got back we were exhausted. Jesus realized this. He said, “Come on, let’s go to a deserted place by ourselves and rest awhile.” That sounded wonderful. So we packed a picnic lunch, loaded the boat, and set off across the lake of Galilee to a deserted beach on the other side.

I should have known. When we landed on this deserted beach, there were 5,000 people waiting for us: blind people, lame people, rich people, poor people, distinguished religious leaders and despised prostitutes—all of them wanting to see Jesus, all of them wanting to hear him, to touch him, to experience his healing for themselves and their families.

So much for the picnic. We tried to help as many as we could, but there wasn’t enough of us to go around. How do 13 people meet the needs of 5000 people, all of whom are there because they are needy? We worked until sunset, and finally I said to Jesus, “Look, this is God-forsaken place. Well, maybe not God-forsaken if you’re here, but it is still pretty bleak. Send the people away to get something to eat. We came here to rest, remember. We haven’t taken time to eat ourselves. Send them away, and let’s have our picnic.

Jesus said, “Why don’t we give them something to eat?” I just looked at him. “How are we going to feed all these people? There are thousands. You think we’ve got a spare ten grand for cooked lamb and pita bread? And where would we get it, anyway. We are in the middle of nowhere.”

Jesus shrugged. He said, “Well, how much do we have?” I said, “Just what we brought for the picnic: five loaves of bread and a couple fish.” “Get it out,” he said, “and tell everyone to sit down.”

We sat down, and I watched as Jesus handed out our lunch. “Great,” I thought. “There’s not enough for the crowd, and now there’s not enough for us either.”

I closed my eyes and tried to think of something other than my rumbling stomach. Then someone tapped me on the shoulder. He said, “Hey, have a piece of bread and some fish.” I looked up, and he was holding a full basket. I looked around, and all over the hill people were holding baskets full of fish and bread—more fish and bread than I had ever seen. They were collecting the leftovers. I guess we had enough after all.

When we came back across the lake to where we started, there were more people clamoring for help. People brought their sick relatives to Jesus on mats or laid them out along the road where he would pass by. They begged to touch even the hem of his robe, and everyone

who touched it was healed. But where did it end? The need never stopped. The line of people coming for help was endless. It was hopeless.

We still needed to get away. So Jesus suggested going to the region of Tyre, north of Galilee. There weren't many Jews in the region of Tyre. I think Jesus hoped that maybe no one there had heard of him.

Wrong! We had just found a place to stay when there was a knock at the door. It was a woman, which itself was a little shocking. A lone woman knocking on a stranger's door is little forward, if you ask me. And she wasn't even Jewish. She looked like a Syrian or Phoenician and spoke Greek. She begged Jesus to cast a demon out of her daughter.

Here we go again, I thought. Everywhere we go people are looking for God's healing: healing for their bodies, healing for their hearts, healing of their relationships. They want help for their children, help for their parents, help for themselves. They want food and shelter and freedom. We can't do it! There isn't enough of Jesus to go around. There isn't enough of us to go around. There isn't enough time or energy or money to meet all these needs. What does God expect of us?

This time I had to say something. I said to Jesus, "Look, we don't even have enough time, energy, or resources to help even our own people, the people of Israel. They are the people for whom you were sent, remember. You are the Messiah, the promised king of *Israel*. You can't take on the problems of the rest of the world."

Jesus listened to me, then Jesus said to the woman, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

I was shocked. I couldn't remember a time when Jesus had ever agreed with me. Well, I thought, he finally gets it. You have to take care of your own before you take care of anyone else. Though I didn't think he should have compared the woman to a dog. "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." Wow, that's a little cold. I did not realize until later that by using the image of dogs under the table, he was opening a door for her.

The woman didn't blink. She looked at Jesus and said, "Yes, but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Jesus said to her, "You are right. Go, the demon has left your daughter."

Now I was puzzled. All the other people Jesus healed, he healed in person. They came to Jesus themselves, or they were brought to him on a stretcher. In a few cases Jesus made house calls. He went to Peter's home to heal Peter's mother-in-law, and he went to Jairus' home to heal his sick daughter. But this was the first time Jesus healed someone from a distance. It's like he multiplied his time and his reach, just like he multiplied the bread.

"Even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." I thought back to all the times when I worried about having enough: when we went on that mission trip and I wondered what we would have to eat, when our picnic was crashed by 5000 uninvited guests and I wondered

how we would feed them, or the time we crossed the lake and forgot to bring any bread with us. Each time I worried about having enough, and we ended up with leftovers.

Maybe that Greek woman understood something that we didn't. Maybe she realized that with Jesus there is always bread enough to go around. You may feel or I may feel that there isn't enough. There isn't enough money to help the poor and homeless. There aren't enough people to start a new church. There isn't enough time to pray and read the Bible and go to church when there are so many other things that need to be done. Maybe you think there is not enough of you to go around. But maybe there is, if you take what you have and offer it to Jesus.

- Ken Onstot
July 6, 2008