

The Way of Provision

Matthew 14:13-17

INTRODUCTION

Old Abe had always wanted a son. You know, someone to carry on the family name. But he was now 75 years old. And childless. And his wife was 65 years old. To further complicate the matter, his wife had infertility problems. So Old Abe was resigned to dying childless. It simply wasn't meant to be.

But then a strange thing happened. One night Old Abe had a dream. In his dream God promised that, despite his age and despite the infertility issues, he would soon become a daddy. Amazing! Unbelievable! So incredible was the thought of this possibility, his wife broke out in laughter when Old Abe told her about the dream. But Old Abe was convinced that the dream was real. He was going to be a dad.

The years passed, and no baby. Five years. Ten years. Fifteen. Twenty. Nothing. But then when Old Abe turned 100 – and his wife turned 90, by the way – she gave birth to a baby. A son. Old Abe named him son “Isaac.” That's a Hebrew word that means “laughter.”

- “Who is laughing now?” Old Abe thought.

Everything was great for quite a while. But then one night when Isaac was about 13 years old, that same God who had appeared to him in that first dream reappeared in a second one. This time the directive was to take that precious son up on a mountain and offer him as a human sacrifice. Suddenly it wasn't funny anymore.

But Old Abe continued to trust, so he bundled up wood for the fire and took his son Isaac up on the mountain, just as God had said. Along the way, Isaac asked his daddy a question.

- Hey, Dad. I see the wood and I see the torch. I don't see anything for a sacrifice. Where will that come from?

Old Abe – this man who had lived by faith for many, many years – didn't falter in his faith in that moment either.

Abraham answered, “God will provide.” (Genesis 22:8)

Jehovah-Jireh. The Lord will provide.

During this Lenten season we have chosen to follow Jesus along

THE WAY

Because we are convinced of the truth in this verse:

Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

So far in this series, we have walked with Jesus along:

- The Way Through
- The Way of the Kingdom
- The Way of the Cross

In this part of the series, we are walking with Jesus along The Way of Provision.

Now, you might have thought I ended the Gospel reading in an unusual place. I agree. I did. Thank you for noticing. If this were a TV series, you were left off at the cliffhanger.

“We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” (the disciples) answered.
(Matthew 14:17)

The reading ended with a problem. A big problem. 5,000 hungry men, plus hungry women and children. 20,000 hungry people. You heard Jesus instructed these poor disciples to feed that hungry multitude.

Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”
(Matthew 14:16)

But those poor disciples only had a little boy's lunch. Five dinner rolls and two pieces of fish. Slightly more than a Chik-fil-A kid's meal. That might satisfy the little boy, but that's not enough for the multitude. Not even close. But that's all they had.

Let's take a moment to connect with the story. Think about a time when you were facing something big and you knew it was more than you had the ability to handle.

- Grief can be like that. “How am I ever going to get through this?” I can't stop crying.
- Divorce can be like that, too. “How do I raise my children as a single parent?”
- We faced a moment like that as a congregation when COVID hit. “How will we ever hold this congregation together when we can't even meet together?”
- Think of the biggest challenge you have ever faced, knowing that apart from a miracle you were doomed to fail.
- Got it?

Now hear these three truths.

TRUTH #1: NO RESOURCES IS NO PROBLEM FOR OUR GOD

God fed a multitude before. About a million people – and that's a conservative estimate – left Egypt under the leadership of Moses. Not long after they left, those million people got hungry. So how did God feed a million people in the wilderness?

That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like

frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. Moses said to them, "It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. (Exodus 16:13-16)

Now, where did God get all that food? Well, some skeptics would say the birds were blown in from the Mediterranean Sea. Really? Enough birds to feed a million people every day for forty years? Quail don't reproduce that fast. Rabbits maybe. But not quail. No resources is no problem for our God.

Or what about the story of creation? You remember how the story goes:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)

So, where did God get the stuff to create what He created? The theological term for this is:

ex nihilo

These words literally mean "from nothing." God created all that we see and are from nothing. No resources is no problem for our God.

TRUTH #2: GOD USES WHAT WE ALREADY HAVE

God doesn't need anything in order to provide for His people, but sometimes God chooses to begin with something. And that something is quite often something we already have.

For example, when Moses was called to stand before Pharaoh and demand the release of the children of Israel, He started with what Moses already had. A shepherd's staff.

Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The Lord did not appear to you'?" Then the Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" "A staff," he replied. The Lord said, "Throw it on the ground." Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. (Exodus 3:1-3)

And with staff in hand Moses faced down the most powerful man on earth. Let my people go!

In today's text, God started with five loaves and two fish. He could have fed the multitude with nothing, but in this instance God started with something. He wanted someone – the boy – to be willing to give up everything in order for everyone to be fed – the boy included.

That approach is not unusual. Even though God doesn't need, He often uses what we have so He can multiply it into something more. Remember what God promises with the tithe?

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse... Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. (Malachi 3:10)

By taking the limited resources we have – time, money, patience, love, faith – God transforms it into a major blessing.

There is an old Sunday School chorus that says:

Little is much when God is in it.

TRUTH #3: GOD PROVIDES WHEN THERE IS A NEED

The people were hungry. There was a need and God responded to it.

It is a recurring theme of Scripture that God's provision is in response to a need from His people. It's a truth reflected in what the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Philippi:

My God will supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 4:19)

Karen and I went to college with a young woman named Claire. Claire was a Christian Education major. She was also the spitting image of Lucy Van Pelt. In fact when we did the musical "You're a Good Man Charlie Brown," Claire played Lucy. (I was Linus; Karen was Peppermint Patty.)

- Claire went to college on a prayer. Literally on a prayer. I saw it happen. And I heard her give testimony to it several times.
- Our college mailboxes were in the same room as the game room – where the pool tables and ping pong tables were.
- I was in that room sharpening my air hockey skills one day, when Claire came in to get her mail. But before she opened her box, she stopped and prayed.
- When she opened the box, she started to give praise to God. In there was a check from someone who felt led to send her some money to help with her tuition. And it was exactly what she needed for that month's bill.

My God will supply all your needs. He is Jehovah-Jireh. The God who provides.

APPLICATION

Let me close with a personal and very recent example. During this season of the year, I have to write at least two sermons a week. Holy Week I will need to write four. Throw in a Sunday School lesson or a funeral message, and you will see that every day in my schedule has to be productive. No exceptions.

- Unfortunately Monday was not a productive day. My goal had been to have this sermon written by the time I left the office on Monday night. I didn't write the first word.

- I had an evening meeting that night too. So before I left the office that night, I told the Lord I felt bit overwhelmed. I didn't know where I was going to get the time to write the necessary sermons this week.
 - I got in the car and started home. It is a ten minute drive.
 - By the time I got home, the outline for this sermon was in my head.
 - I rushed into the house, grabbed a piece of paper, and jotted it all down before I forgot any of it.

God provides. Jehovah-Jireh.

Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. His way is a Way of Provision.

Amen.