

John 6:1-15

If you had a chance to look at the bulletin before the service began, you're probably wondering what I mean by **A Spiritual Math Lesson**, the phrase which serves as the theme for today's sermon. Perhaps a prime example of a **spiritual** math lesson would be God's explanation of the Holy **Trinity** - 1 Father + 1 Son + 1 Holy Spirit = 1 God or $1+1+1=1$. That doesn't make **sense** to our **human** minds, but since God says that's the way it **is**, we **accept** it and **believe** it. That's the sort of thing I mean by **spiritual** math.

Today we will learn from **Jesus** as He teaches us another **Spiritual Math Lesson**. Perhaps we could state **this** equation as: 5 loaves + 2 fish + 1 Savior = the feeding of 5,000 men + women + children + 12 baskets of leftover pieces, **or** 1 very **special** miracle. This **Spiritual Math Lesson** begins with the **crowd**.

Actually, Jesus was trying to get **away** from the crowds of people, in order to take a little **vacation**. Things had been so **busy** for Jesus and His disciples that they hadn't even been taking time to **eat**! The time had come for a little **rest and relaxation**, so Jesus and His disciples set out in a boat, to cross the Sea of Galilee. The area to the **east** of the sea was less populated than the area in which they had been working, and the disciples thought it would offer them a good opportunity for more **personal** study with Jesus, and **reflection** on His words.

However, that was not going to happen, because the crowd saw Jesus get into the boat, and they ran along the shore line to **follow** Him. They were **interested** in Jesus because they had seen Him healing the **sick** throughout Galilee. In that sense their faith was still very **immature**. They were primarily interested only in the **signs**, not in the **fact** that Jesus was their **Savior** from sin. Nevertheless, Jesus kept on striving to **build up** their tiny faith, by teaching them about the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus' **pulpit** for that day was a **natural** one - the great **outdoors**. Those of you who have experienced an **outdoor** worship service - whether it was at an Easter Sunrise service, or a Picnic Sunday service in the park, or at a youth rally, a campfire devotion, or some **other** time and place - can attest to the fact that there is something very **special** and **stirring** about worshiping God under the canopy of His creation. It must have been a beautiful sight to see these **thousands** of people in their brightly colored Oriental clothing, sitting down on the green hillside, with a backdrop of blue sea and sky. However, probably even **more** beautiful to Jesus,

was the undivided **attention** which the crowd gave to Him as He spoke. It appears that Jesus must have taught those people for quite a long time too, because the next thing we know **evening** was setting in, the people had not **eaten**, and Jesus decided to give His disciples a **test**. It's time for the **Math Lesson** to begin.

Jesus started with **Philip** asking him, "*Where shall we buy **bread** for these people to eat?*" Philip, one of Jesus' **earliest** disciples, should have known that Jesus would **provide** the necessary food, because he had been present when Jesus had changed water into **wine** at the wedding in Cana. But instead, Philip started **calculating**. He said, "*(Figure it out, Lord,) 'Eight month's wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!'*" Andrew was **another** disciple who had witnessed the miracle at Cana, but **he** didn't do any better than **Philip**. He calculated **too**, "*Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?*"

I suppose it's fairly easy for us to sit back and say that the disciples should have **known** that Jesus would provide, if only they had been **thinking** about the love and the power of **Jesus**. But then again, do **we** really react any better than the **disciples** did? What happens when God takes our **job** away from us for 6 months and then says, "*What will you do **now**?*" Don't we do some quick **calculating**? Don't we try to figure out how we can make our savings **stretch** until we get our job back again? Or what happens when our congregation's **worship attendance** drops off dramatically and the LORD says, "*What will you do **now**?*" Don't we do some more **calculating**? Don't we try to figure out how to bring **more people** back into our worship services? Or what happens when a person who hasn't been sick a day in their life, suddenly winds up in the hospital with a gallbladder attack, or a brain tumor, or terminal cancer, and the LORD asks, "*What will you do **now**?*" Again, don't we do some **calculating**? Don't we try to figure out **why** the LORD allowed us to get sick? Of **course** we do! We **calculate** in order to find a **solution**, just like the **disciples** did, instead of simply looking to the love and power of **Jesus**. We **know** that Jesus has the answers, but somehow when the shoe is on **our** foot, we have just as hard a time **seeing** those answers as **Philip** and **Andrew** did.

The disciples **failed** their test. Jesus knew all along what He was going to do with that crowd. He had already fed their **souls** with His precious Word, and now He would also feed their **bodies** with miraculous food. Jesus continued His **Spiritual Math Lesson** by showing the disciples how **He** could **multiply**. Our text says, "*Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were*

seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.” Many people have tried to **rationalize** this miracle by saying that Jesus used, as an **example**, the little boy who was willing to **share** his lunch. And, when everybody else saw the unselfishness of that little boy, they were **ashamed** of themselves, and decided to share **their** lunches **too** - so all of a sudden, there was **plenty** of food, and the whole multitude was fed! That’s a nice story about human nature, but it **destroys** the **miracle** which Jesus performed - and besides, that’s just **not** the way it happened. **Jesus** provided food for the multitude out of **His** abundance and **His** generosity, **not** out of **theirs**. The people and the disciples were **powerless**, but Jesus has the power to do **anything** He wants - to change water into wine, or to make one pancake feed 1,000 men. We are wise if we look to Jesus in **faith** to provide for **us** too. As the Psalmist writes, *“The eyes of all look to You, and You give them their food at the proper time. You open Your hand, and satisfy the desires of every living thing.”*

Jesus certainly satisfied the desires of the crowd in our **text** by **multiplying** 5 loaves and 2 fish. That **Spiritual Math Lesson** would probably have been **enough** for the disciples and the crowd to absorb - but Jesus **continued** the lesson with some **addition** as well! We read, *“When they had all had enough to eat, He said to His disciples, ‘Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.’ So they gathered them, and filled 12 baskets with the pieces of the 5 barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.”* Besides feeding the entire crowd to their **satisfaction**, Jesus also provided an **additional** 12 baskets of food - far **more** than they had even **started out** with!

The question is **why**? Jesus obviously didn’t **need** the food - He could miraculously provide **more** at any time. The reason for gathering up the additional scraps was so that nothing would be **wasted**. No matter who we are, we have all been given precious **gifts** from God. Perhaps we are even privileged to have **more** gifts than we **need**. But Jesus wants us to be sure that we don’t waste **anything** which God gives us - whether it is our **food**, our **family**, our **education**, our **time**, our **talents**, or **whatever**.

And finally, we see the **result** of Jesus’ **Spiritual Math Lesson**. *“The people began to say, ‘Surely this is the **Prophet** who is come into the world.’”* This lesson, as with **all** the miraculous signs which Jesus performed, was meant to show the people that He was the **Messiah** - the promised **Savior**. That much Jesus had accomplished. Unfortunately, the people didn’t understand what **kind** of a Savior He was going to be. They didn’t **want** a Savior from the guilt, and

pollution, and misery of **sin**. They wanted a “**bread king**” - a hero who would save them from the power of the **Roman Empire**, and who would provide for their **physical** wants and needs. Jesus realized that the people were misunderstanding the **purpose** behind His miracles, so He dispersed the crowd, and went up onto the mountain by Himself. It was time to **end** the lesson for that day, but Jesus would continue to build up their **faith** at **another** time. He would **not** give up on them.

Jesus doesn't give up on **us** either. Maybe we don't understand as much as we should about His **Word** - Jesus will try again. Maybe we don't **trust** Him as completely as we should - Jesus will try again. Maybe we need to become less **wasteful** of our God-given gifts and abilities - Jesus will try again. May we all continue to give Jesus those **opportunities** to try **again** with us, as we frequently **hear** and **study** His Word, and as we receive His **Holy Supper** with thanksgiving. Maybe we have **failed** God's tests in the past, but by His grace, we may just learn to **enjoy** spiritual math in the **future**! Amen.