The disciples said, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” And Jesus replied, “Bring them here to me.”

There is so much need in the world, in our country, in our city, in our homes, in each of us… there is so much need that the weight of it can feel so overwhelming that we look around at our time, our talent, and our treasure and we respond just like the disciples… we have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.. we have nothing here but a few hours, some creativity and maybe 50 bucks..

But Jesus looks at our meager offerings and says bring what little you have, give it to me and I will multiply it for you.

There are two interpretations of this scripture that have been circling around over the last decade or so…

The most common interpretation of this passage over the ages has been that Jesus miraculously multiples the bread and the fish… Jesus blesses the two fish and the five loaves, gives them to his disciples and when they start giving the fish and bread to the crowd, the food never runs out. You can just see it, the disciples start with a basket with just one fish in it. They hand it to the first hungry family and when they approach the next family, they turn to the basket expecting it to be empty but now it is full… and there’s a burst of joy within them and the crowd before them. This interpretation sees this miracle as a miracle of abundance that defies the laws of nature.

More recently many pastors have interpreted this passage as a miracle that does not defy the laws of nature.. but defies our human inclinations. Perhaps the fish and bread did not supernaturally multiply before their eyes, perhaps instead as Jesus shared the two fish and five loaves with his disciples the people in the crowd began looking for whatever morsels of food they had and started sharing with those around them, and as people shared there was enough for everyone to eat and there were even left overs. The miracle was a miracle of generosity. And you might think well this isn’t really a miracle, but just look at any survivor reality show, any dog guarding it’s food, or even for that matter any toddler with a candy bar. When resources are scarce, we don’t want to share. We hoard.. The resources were scarce where the Jesus was. The crowd would have had to walk for hours to get food. I’m sure the disciples did not want to share their meager portion of food. They’d rather send the crowd away to get food so that they could sit down after a long day of ministry and eat their small portion of food. When supply is limited and you get your hands on some of the supply, you do not want to share it right away - you have to be encouraged to share..usually we have to be assured that more or enough will be available to us before we decide to share… but Jesus said bring the five loaves and the two fish to me… I will bless it and you will share it and that simple act releases everyone in the crowd from their tendency to guard and hoard their resources and they too begin to share their food and in so doing there is not only enough… there is more than enough… it is a miracle of generosity…

So there are these two interpretations… the feeding of the five thousand was a supernatural miracle or a miracle of generosity….but what if this passage is actually a depiction of both…

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There is an incredible missionary named Heidi, who serves orphans in Mozambique. She felt called to serve orphans there, so she and her husband and children moved there and began serving. They began with nothing and had no one to go to, but she lives her life on the belief that we need to stop for the one. She preaches about it and encourages people to simply “stop for the one” in front of you. She moved her whole family to Mozambique on the belief that they would get there and just stop for the one in front of them. They began to have so many orphans following them around and adults began to adopt the same belief - stop for the one. Together they all built an orphanage that serves thousands of orphans, providing them with a home, food, school, and a lot of fun, singing, dancing, playing games, and worshiping.

Years ago, she came and she preached at Yale about her work with the orphans. She said one day they were making some chili for a lunch meeting of about 12 staff members when gun fire broke out around the compound. Rebels were tearing through the town and a war broke out. After securing the compound and the safety of the children, the staff came back to their staff lounge to collect themselves when someone rushed in to report that the trucks with the groceries for tonights dinner for the thousands of children could not make it to the compound because there was so much heavy gunfire. They all began to worry about what they would do for the children for dinner. There was no food in the compound except for the one pot of chili they had made for lunch and not yet eaten. Heidi looked at the pot of chili and said we are going to pray and we are going to feed them this chili. The staff looked at her like she was nuts, but they had also seen what she had grown out of nothing so they followed her lead. She brought the pot out with all the children assembled as if nothing was wrong and told everyone to line up with their bowls. She said the pot of chili never ran out. It was a supernatural miracle.. unbelievable even to the people serving it… they would scoop out a bowl and go to scoop out another bowl and somehow the amount of chili never went down..

Heidi could have thought.. I have nothing to give, so I won’t give… but instead she stood before God and said I have nothing to give and no one yet to serve, but I will bring to you what I have, my life and my family member also want to give their lives and Jesus took what little they had to offer and multiplied it, multiplied their ministry by bringing orphans to them and volunteers to help out - a miracle of generosity.. and Jesus also multiplied it with a supernatural miracle of abundance in a time of great need.

What if God does both? What if Jesus wants us to bring our meager offerings and sometimes inspire people to be generous and sometimes supernaturally multiply and magnify our efforts and sometimes God does both..

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Jonah cannot drive past a homeless person on the side of the road without at least trying to scrounge around in our car for whatever we have to give them. He has always been like this even as a tiny child and even after I've explained why some people become homeless and that they sometimes are doing drugs.. he still cannot help but be moved by them.. Elias can't help but save the trees from invasive species… you can ask him about that.. but Jonah he cannot pass by a homeless person without giving something to them… so I had to stock the car with granola bars and socks and hand warmers and AA booklets… and dollar bills and we were always running out so we thought of reaching out to the church and now we are giving out snack bags all over greater new haven and one day Jonah joyfully handed a homeless man a purple snack bag through our car window on his way to hockey and the man said, "you have a good mom that makes you snack bags. My mom never did that for me." Jonah happily replied, "Oh that's not for me.. my church made that snack bag for you." Before the light turned green, a tear rolled down the man's soiled face.. He said, "this is the first snack bag that's ever been made for me. Thank you." We had to drive off, roll up the window, and a quiet came over us as our hearts both ached for the man his pain and leapt for joy that we could alleviate just a little of his pain.

God took the literal scraps in our car and multiplied and multiple and multiplied them with a miracle generosity in the abundant giving of this church but I would also argue God brought about a supernatural miracle of healing to this man and I hope others as well.

And here's the thing.. I meet with so many patients who are facing the end of their lives and they wonder if they've done enough. I'll never forget a woman who had widespread metastatic cancer. She wanted to continue aggressive treatment because she said she had not done enough. As I processed this with her she said she felt she only really helped her children and never served at a soup kitchen or volunteered at a clothing closet. She thought she needed to do those things to be a good christian and to get into heaven…

I had a similar concern at one point and wonderful Methodist pastor and pediatrician at Yale New Haven Hospital sat me down and said, "Jane if you don't take care of your children, someone else will have to. You are giving to the world by serving your children."

Jesus says bring your meager offerings to me and I will multiply them. Heidi says, stop for the one. Sometimes the one God is calling you to is an orphan in Mozambique or the homeless on the street or maybe it's the tree in need of rescue, or your newborn in need of everything, or you adult children who struggle with mental health… or maybe the one is you in need of medical care…

There is so much need in the world, in our country, in our city, in our homes, in each of us…and our offerings can feel so, so very meager, but Jesus says to us today, 'bring them to me" and I will bless your offerings and I will in one way or another multiply them for good…

… ……..So in the week ahead pray… ask Jesus to show you the need around you and perhaps even the need inside you… look at your meager offerings and bring them to Jesus. You can even pray this prayer, "Jesus I just have this to give, can you bless this and multiply it." And watch for how Jesus creates miracles out of the little you have to offer.