

2 Corinthians 9:8-11

⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written: “He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.”

¹⁰ Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

You know, there's something different, something special, about the Feeding of the Five Thousand. In fact, there's something different about all those miracles where Jesus provides for people's physical needs. With most of Jesus' miracles, he does all the work himself. He has to. When he healed the sick, he didn't require that people provide him with a little medicine or carry out a therapy routine. He just placed his hands on them and healed them. When he drove out demons, he didn't ask people to provide magical trinkets. He commanded, and the demons fled. When Jesus raised the dead to life, he didn't require anything from anyone. He simply spoke and the dead were raised to life.

But when it came to Jesus' miracles of *providing* for physical needs, there's something different. When Jesus miraculously provided food and drink, he made use of what people had available. In our gospel lesson for today, the Feeding of the Five Thousand, Jesus takes five small loaves of bread and two small fish, and miraculously, he multiplies that humble meal so that everyone is satisfied with twelve large baskets left over. In a similar miracle, Jesus fed a crowd of four thousand—by taking seven loaves and a few fish his disciples had. Or when Jesus attended the wedding at Cana, he took water that the family had and miraculously turned it into wine. In all of these miracles, he could have easily created food and drink out of thin air, but instead he made use of what the people had.

That makes these miracles of provision *different* from his other miracles, and it's an important difference that's worth considering. There are some things in life that are totally out of our hands, and the only thing we can do is surrender them to God's hands. Dangerous or untreatable illness, sudden financial catastrophe, the really big problems or distant troubles that we can hear about but only pray about—some things, only God can handle.

But on the other hand, there are many things in life that God has given into our care, our stewardship, and God accomplishes his will through us. God provides for our families through the work that we do. He brings others to faith and strengthens them when we share the Word with them. And through all of this, we have his promise in our sermon text this morning: “He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way.”

God doesn't always make it obvious how things are going to work out. In fact, many times, it seems impossible that he'll make good on his promises. But as we saw in our gospel lesson and in our sermon text, and no doubt as we've seen in our own lives, God takes what we have and multiplies it into everything that we need.

Do you realize how much we have seen of this in our congregation? Just look at the things that have been accomplished here in the last two years alone! What started as carpet replacement blossomed into a full-blown remodeling of our education wing—a project of over ten thousand dollars. And it's done and paid for. Water damage to our bell tower led to crumbling brick—over sixteen thousand dollars in repairs. And it's done and paid for. In just a few weeks, we'll have a ninety-inch television on our wall to enhance our worship—over six thousand dollars. And it's all paid for. All told, that's thirty-two thousand dollars in major projects and expenses, not to mention our regular operating expenses.

If you had asked me two years ago how all that was going to happen, I wouldn't have had an answer beyond a reassurance of, “The Lord will provide.” But our need has been satisfied. The Lord has provided. And he's done it through you, through your generosity and gifts. It hasn't just been you giving. It's God giving through you.

Truly, our God is more loving and generous than we could ever ask him to be. But even though he meets our bodily needs and exceeds them, that would be meaningless if he hadn't also met our spiritual needs. Our spiritual needs are far more serious and far more important than our bodily needs, but Jesus lives to meet them.

The fact that we are sinful can be seen from any part of our day to day life, but we see it especially in the way that we worry over things. We have no reason to worry about anything. We have the Lord Almighty on our side, and he loves us as our dear Father in heaven. He has promised again and again that he will take care of us, and that should be enough for us to trust in him completely. And even if that weren't enough, he has shown us time and again in the Bible that we can trust in his promises.

But despite all of that, we still find reasons to doubt and worry. I can't pay my bills. I don't have enough for retirement. Prices are going up. I'm sick again. I can't afford my medical treatments. I'm not insured. My house is falling apart. My car needs repairing. They consume our thoughts and threaten to devour our lives until we're not doing anything except worrying. Instead of trusting that God will provide for our needs, we keep worrying where it's all going to come from.

And where does that worry lead us? If we doubt that God will provide, if we think we won't have enough, if we won't trust him to make good on his promise, then how can we ever be generous? How can we ever abound in good works? The natural end of that worry is greed, misery, miserliness, and isolation from others. The giving stops. The generosity withers. The comfort fades. The love grows cold.

But Jesus has satisfied all of our needs, both physical and spiritual. Jesus called himself the bread of life, because he satisfies our souls like a good meal nourishes our bodies. He came out to meet us in the wilderness of our sin and he gave his own life for us on the cross. His death and resurrection have removed all doubt and taken away our sinful worry forever, so that we will never hunger for salvation again! He gives us his own body to eat and his own blood to drink in the Lord's Supper, to calm our doubts, to reassure us of his love, and to grant us his true forgiveness. He gives us his word, so that when we have our doubts and fears, we can turn to the Bible and he will continually feed and nourish our souls day after day.

Why does God provide for us? Of course, it's only because he loves us and he has promised to give his people what they need for life. But there's another reason why God provides for my needs, as Paul writes: "God is able to make all grace abound to you, *so that* in all things at all times, having all that you need, *you will abound in every good work.*" Paul writes, "You will be made rich in every way *so that you can be generous on every occasion.*"

When God provides for me, he is also providing for others. God gives to me so that I too may give. In fact, that's a truth that shows up everywhere in the Bible, and not just about our material possessions. It's about *everything*. *Anything* God gives us, he also wants to be given to others. "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work." What are the things that abound to us? Love? We love because Christ first loved us. Forgiveness? As God has forgiven us, so too we forgive one another. Comfort? God comforts us in all our troubles so that we too may comfort others. His Holy Word? What God taught his apostles and prophets, they have passed on to us in the Bible, so that we too may share his Word with others. Spiritual gifts? God equips his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. And earthly riches? "You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion." There will always be a place for hard work, and it is God-pleasing to enjoy the fruits of our labor. But there will always be a place as well for generosity, for giving to the poor, for being the blessing that God has called us to be.

What a joy it is to take part in this great feast as we come again and again to receive the bread of life in Jesus Christ our Lord! We join with one another and with our dear Savior as we come to hear his Word. And in all things, no matter the trouble or temptation or worry, we put our full trust in our loving and powerful God. We have full confidence that he frees us from worry, exceeds all our needs, and cares for us until he brings us into his heavenly banquet for all eternity. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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