

**Luke 9:10-17** *When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida, <sup>11</sup>but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing. <sup>12</sup>Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here." <sup>13</sup>He replied, "You give them something to eat." They answered, "We have only five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all this crowd." <sup>14</sup>(About five thousand men were there.) But he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each." <sup>15</sup>The disciples did so, and everyone sat down. <sup>16</sup>Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people. <sup>17</sup>They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

As we make our Thanksgiving preparations and get ready to gather with family and friends tomorrow, I think we tend to forget what a difficult road the first pilgrims had to travel toward the first thanksgiving. We look at all the plenty of food available to us in our grocery stores, we think of the modern appliances which make keeping food and cooking it so much easier, we sit in our well-built homes designed and built to keep us cool in the summer and warm in the winter and it's easy to forget that the first colonists had an extremely rough entry into the new world. In September of 1620, 102 people set off from England in the Mayflower for the new land of America. After a 66-day journey, they finally made land in America, much farther north than they had planned near what we now call Plymouth Rock in Massachusetts. Landing in the north in November did not make their plight any easier. The landing party they sent ashore found only an abandoned Indian village. They were running dangerously low on food and supplies. The frozen ground could not produce anything for them to eat. Most of the people spent the winter on board the Mayflower. Due to the harsh winter environment, along with the lack of food and the epidemic of disease which swept through the colony, only half of the people made it through the winter. 80% of the women who made the journey on the Mayflower died by the end of the winter. If it were not for the help of an Indian named Squanto who became their chief interpreter and guide along with Massasoit the chief of the Wampanoag tribe who helped them to plant corn in March of 1621 and showed them how to survive in the wild landscape, it is likely that none of the colonists who came over on the Mayflower would have survived. They had plenty of reasons to give thanks that God had brought them safely through that first year. As we look back to the start of this great yearly tradition of setting aside time after the harvest to give thanks to the Lord for all the goodness of his blessings which he has given to us, we see this is just another example of the truth our text for tonight proclaims so loudly: **The Lord Always Provides**. God always provides for his people!

This is why we have gathered here tonight. We take the time as part of our Thanksgiving celebration to gather in God's house with our fellow believers to bring our praise to God who is the giver of all that we have and give thanks to him that he has been faithful to his promise to watch over and protect us as his people. As we look back over the year behind us and take stock of all the material and earthly blessings we have, we can only come to one single conclusion: the Lord always provides! We certainly don't live in a time and situation like the first pilgrims. We have plenty of job opportunities to help provide for our families. We have homes that are well built to protect us from the elements. The clothes we have available to us now provide much more protection in extreme environments. We have grocery stores available with aisle after aisle of food prepared and ready for us to purchase. Even if we were a bit down on our luck and lacking, there are plenty of agencies around to help us get through the tough times. Systems are set up to make sure that help is available. Yet we still worry about all of our earthly issues. We worry about where the next meal is going to come from and where we will find the money to take care of this or that. We fret about the mortgage coming due and if we'll have a place to stay going forward. The debt that you've built up over the years feels like it's going to crush you. Instead of feeling blessed about what we do have, we worry about what we don't have. How many times don't we find ourselves, whether individually or collectively as a congregation, feeling that we don't know where the money is going to come from to do all the things we need to do. We find ourselves doubting God's ability to provide for us, to rescue us or to intervene to help us. We feel like we never have enough of what we need or that we're never enough for what life requires. We are worried, anxious, sometimes just downright scared that we aren't going to be taken care of.

The one lesson God would have us take to heart tonight is very simple: **The Lord Always Provides!** This is the lesson God wanted his disciples to know and it was written down in all four of the gospels so that we can learn that same lesson. This miracle in our text wasn't as much for the crowd who gathered together that day as it was for the sake of the disciples. The disciples had just gone on a mission trip proclaiming his message. As they left for this mission trip, Jesus had instructed them to take nothing with them—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic. Jesus wanted them to have the assurance that as they went about his work of proclaiming the gospel, they would always have what they needed to sustain their life. They could count on the fact that he would always provide for them. If they would seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and make their focus doing his work, they could be assured that all these other things would be given to them as well.

But the disciples hadn't fully learned this lesson. As the day wore on, they became increasingly uneasy about how this crowd was going to be housed and fed. They knew they were in a remote place where food and lodging were at a premium. They wanted to make sure all the people could get to the market before it closed so they could have food to eat. But rather

than simply taking care of the matter by himself, Jesus threw the question back at the disciples to drive his point home. Imagine the shock of the disciples as Jesus said, "You give them something to eat." They must have been flabbergasted. Maybe they even stammered a little bit as they tried to respond to what seemed to them to be a ridiculous statement by Jesus. They answered the way that many of God's people still do when confronted with a seemingly impossible situation: "WE CAN'T DO THAT! We only have 5 loaves of bread and two fish. That couldn't possibly feed all these people! The only way we could do this is to go buy the food for the people and we don't have that kind money!" With their minds focused only on earthly things and material benefits, they lost sight of who was giving them this command. They failed the test. They didn't have the faith strong enough to believe that Jesus would take care of this for them. They looked at themselves and their abilities and quickly came away with the reality that they couldn't do it.

How many times haven't you and I failed the same test? We might trust in God for our salvation, but fail to trust that God will take care of us and provide for us in the lesser things. We quickly affirm that he is more than sufficient for our salvation but don't trust him with our everyday struggles and problems. When confronted with those huge and overwhelming walls that seem impossible to overcome, we let our fears get the best of us and proclaim with the disciples, "We can't do that!"

Ironically, this is the lesson God would have us learn along with his disciples. We can't do that. Not by ourselves. Not on our own. Not without God's blessings. God uses those times of lacking to help us see our inability to meet these problems to help us not only look to him but marvel at him as the giver of all things. Jesus didn't harshly rebuke his disciples for their lack of faith. He used his almighty power to teach them a valuable and important lesson: If they focused on doing his work and carrying out his mission, he would always provide for them. They brought to him what they had and Jesus used that to provide what they needed. After giving thanks for the food which they had, Jesus handed it out to the disciples for them to distribute. Imagine what it must have been like for them to go from group to group and provide more than what each group needed to eat! What a blessing from God! To further drive the point home, Jesus had his disciples collect the leftover food. While they started with not enough food to feed the 12 of them, after everyone had their fill, they ended with enough food that each disciple had his own basketful of leftovers. God provided for them and in abundance! How humbling for them to have this firsthand demonstration of their lack of faith and God's ability to provide for them.

As we look back over this year and our entire lives, we see the very same thing. The Lord always has provided. His promise to always provide for his people is one of the central promises of the Christian faith! The Lord provides a rainy spring and warm summer for the sake of our farmers and the seeds in their fields. The Lord provides a job and gives us the ability to do that job so we can provide for our family. The Lord provides friends when we move to a new city. He provides clothes to wear and shelter to live in. The Lord always provides. God forgive our lack of faith and moments of doubt. As we ponder God's goodness to us in always providing for our needs even when we don't always trust him to do so, we realize how unworthy we are to receive these blessings from God. We would deserve to have God cast us away from him into hell for all eternity because of these and all of our sins. Yet, he instead chose to bless us by sending Jesus into this world to provide what we needed spiritually—a Savior from sin. Then, grace upon grace, he chose to shower us with all that we need keep our body and life. The Lord always provides. We don't need to worry. We don't need to be anxious or afraid. We can be certain of his promise to always provide for us.

This allows us to spend all that time we would have spent in worry and fear serving him and carrying out his work. If we were to look at this lesson from the perspective of the crowd, you might come away with the application that you don't have to work or plan for anything—God will just miraculously provide for you. You don't need to plan. You don't need to prepare. Just go about your life and God will provide. There are people who do this. When I was a vicar we had a man who didn't work because he trusted God would provide for him. He just sat at home doing nothing claiming he was just trusting that God would provide for him and his family. Of course, that didn't work. The food didn't just appear out of nowhere. God blesses sweat and wants us to work for our food. This isn't the lesson God would have us learn.

God isn't telling us we don't have bother working or planning for the future because he will always miraculously provide for us. The lesson we can take from this is that we are to use whatever God has and put it to work serving him and trust that he will always provide for us. When it is our goal and focus in life to seek God's kingdom and righteousness, and seek to carry out his work with all our might and use what God has given us to be aggressive in spreading his kingdom, we can trust that he will take care of us. He will use what we have to make sure we have what we need. So as we look back at the year behind us and count the blessings God so graciously has provided for us, I pray that this leads us to become even more focused on carrying out the work of our Lord. I pray that this leads us to respond in joyful thanksgiving and use what God has given us aggressively, generously, and sacrificially for his purposes confident that he will always provide for us. Constant focus on gaining earthly possessions and wealth only takes our focus off of the work God has given to us. The worry and anxiety this produces in us distracts us from the much more important matters of helping people see in Jesus their Savior from sin. So we respond to God's goodness by going about his work confidently knowing that as he did for the 20,000 who gathered before him in our text, as he did for the first pilgrims who came to this land, so he will do for us. The Lord will always provide for us. Amen.