

2022 New Year's Message

Gospel of John 6:1-15

Five loaves, two fishes

Happy New Year, everyone! I look forward to working with you again this year. Today's message is a classic Sunday School story that every Christian, whether a child or an adult, can understand. It is written in all four Gospels. I would like to share with you the principle of the "Kingdom of God" through the miracle of the "five loaves and two fishes".

The story of this miracle was around the second Passover since Jesus' public ministry in the days of the tyrannical King Herod. When we look at Matthew 14:12, we find some very shocking news. John the Baptist had been put to death by King Herod. John the Baptist, who was respected by the people, was cruelly executed by the plot of a woman and her daughter who were having an affair with King Herod. John the Baptist died in disgrace, without a hint of respect as a religious leader. Looking at the death of this righteous man, we can clearly see that it was a dark time when there were no righteous leaders and justice was not possible. In today's world, when we look at the problems in Myanmar, Afghanistan, and the Uighur Autonomous Region in China, we see that justice is not possible, and it seems dark.

In the Gospel of Matthew 14:13, Jesus also heard about the death of John the Baptist. If Jesus, God's Son, knew all about it, we would want Jesus to judge immediately. But if we look at Luke 9:11, we see that Jesus was sad because of the death of John the Baptist, He healed the sick as He usually did and taught the crowd about the "Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ was teaching about the Kingdom of God, which is completely different from the Kingdom of this world.

If you look at verse 5 of today's scripture, you will see that there was a large crowd of people coming towards Jesus. There must have been many people in that crowd who were desperate after hearing about the death of John the Baptist and wanted Jesus to bring about the good kingdom. The people were poor, sick, suffering, and lost without a good leader, in contrast to Herod, who was feasting in his court, eating his fill and doing evil. When Jesus saw them, his heart ached. He knew that they were hungry and wanted to give them something to eat. He was like a mother. Jesus called Philip. He asked him, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He said this because he wanted to test Philip. This test was a continuation of his discipleship training. Looking at Luke

9:1-6, Jesus called the 12 disciples together and gave them the power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases. The twelve disciples had just recently completed their discipleship training, but there was still one more test left. The teacher would usually be able to tell how good the students were if he picked one student and asked him a question. By testing Philip, Jesus also knew the abilities of the other disciples and had something to teach them.

Now it's time for Philip's final answer! This is it. Will he get it right? "Two hundred denarii of bread would not be enough for everyone to eat. Even if you do a rough calculation, you'll need enough daily wages for eight months. In Japanese yen, that would be about 2.5 million yen." The answer was very precise and immediate. Philip must have been one of the most rational disciples, able to calculate quickly and grasp the situation instantly. However, Philip's answer was that he could not feed the crowd at all. It didn't do any good. Nothing happened.

By the way, one of the disciples, who was watching this scene, started to move in a hurry. It was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He was not as quick with his calculations as Philip was, so he was just looking for something to move his body. Andrew suddenly appeared behind Jesus. He said, "Here are five barley loaves. Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" Andrew is the brother of the famous disciple Peter. That is why he can do these amazing things like his brother. His brother Peter was a man of faith who walked on water, so it seems that Andrew is also a man of faith who has the power to act. But as expected, Andrew was not full of conviction, not even his own, while bringing a small boy's lunch. He didn't know what would happen, but he brought it to Jesus anyway.

Would you act like Philip or would you act like Andrew? Most of us might think like Philip, because what we can't do, we can't do. But God's way of thinking and our way of thinking are different. There are many people like Andrew in the Bible. In Numbers 13, two of the 12 scouts, Caleb and Joshua, are mentioned. Ten of the scouts reported negatively that Canaan could not be conquered, but Caleb and Joshua reported quite positively that it could be conquered. This is because Caleb and Joshua believed in God's power, not man's power. Andrew's action today is also an action that came out of his faith in God. Hebrews 12:2 says, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." We want to have faith like Andrew's. We want to

look to Jesus like Andrew did.

I really want to have this faith. I think maybe I have become discouraged that I can't do anything in front of Jesus. I always try and hope for nothing more because I can't imagine anything beyond the scope of my thoughts and powers. However, the world of the Kingdom of God is completely different. In the Kingdom of God, "five loaves and two fishes" can feed a whopping 20,000 people. Jesus must have wanted to teach his disciples this principle of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is driven by "faith," and it spreads and miracles happen. The principles of the Kingdom of God are so powerful that they can move mountains if you have faith like a grain of mustard. It can cast out demons and heal diseases completely. It can be transferred from death to life and be saved. Jesus wanted to teach his disciples this principle of the Kingdom of God.

When Jesus saw what Andrew was doing, he would think "Disciple training passed! And Jesus hurries to prepare food for the hungry people. "Let the people sit down." The disciples had no idea what was going to happen, but the order was given, so they hurried to get the people to sit down. The number of people seated on the lawn was about 5,000 men alone, and if we counted the women and children, there must have been about 20,000 people. The capacity of the Tokyo Dome is about 55,000, so that's about a third of the capacity, which is quite a lot of people. Anyway, everyone sat down.

The little kid I mentioned earlier was spreading out his lunch and looking up at Jesus. Andrew is standing beside him with his hand on the child's shoulder, watching over him. When Jesus saw this lunch, he did not scold him. He smiled, took the bread, and lifted it high. Then he said a prayer of thanksgiving. What kind of prayer of thanksgiving did Jesus say? Let's imagine it together. "Heavenly Father! Here are five loaves of bread and two fish. Andrew brought a small child's lunch. Thank you for his faith. I'm sure you our father is very happy. I am also very happy. Andrew is indeed the disciple I chose. Please bless Andrew's faith so, so much, Father!" After praying, Jesus shared the bread and fish. Here is where the miracle happened. The crowd of 20,000 must have been fuller than they had been in a long time, and some of them even had several refills. They must have been full for the first time in a long time. After they had eaten so much that they could not eat any more, and Jesus said, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." The disciples gathered 12 baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. Jesus' work is a blessing that is not just barely enough, but more than enough.

It was around this time that I realized that something like this "five loaves and two fishes" was also happening in 2022. It is our Mennonite Japanese church. I was watching Miwako, Yuko, and Sanae on a small 3×4 screen as they busily worked in the congregation for the ZOOM service. At that moment, I suddenly thought that I had seen this scene before, and at that moment, I had a flash of inspiration, "Oh, this is exactly the scene in John 6! Miwako, Yuko, and Sanae looked like Andrew walking through the crowd, looking for something.

As I prepared these words, I repented that my faith was so small. After Pastor Gerald and his family came to Tokyo, I couldn't imagine where the Mennonite Japanese Church was going to go, and I was as negative as Philip. I was flipping the abacus, thinking that with only three people, it would be difficult to run the church. However, unlike me, our church had Andrew. Not just one, but three of them. The three of them had taken every precaution to set up the microphones, ZOOM settings, and camera connections. At first I thought it was strange to see the three of them through the ZOOM screen, but the following week, Sakashita-san, Iseko-san, Keiko-san, and Hanako-san came. I gradually felt that I could see 20,000 people who were invisible behind these three people. I could see the sheep of Jesus who were hungry for the word coming from downtown, UBC, Surrey, and Langley. With only "five loaves and two fishes" to feed about 20,000 people, it seems like throwing eggs on a rock. But when we take it to Jesus, a miracle happens. Jesus is pleased, gives thanks to God, prays, and accomplishes miracles of God that we cannot even imagine.

As I prepared this message, I wanted all of us to be disciples of faith like Andrew this year. We already have five loaves and two fishes in our church. I believe that God will be pleased with the five loaves and two fishes of our Mennonite Japanese Church and will bring about the "Kingdom of God". Psalm 81:10 says, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it." In 2022, let us repent of our small faith and open our mouths wide, hoping that God will fill us. To do so, let's look for five loaves and two fishes and bring them to Jesus like Andrew. Last week, Mr. Sakashita said, "I want to get closer to Jesus this year, so I want to read through the Bible and spend more time in prayer." I want to live a life of continuous gratitude, as Pastor Gerald mentioned in his New Year message. I want to stop to have negative thoughts and actively give thanks to God for the whole year.

Today, I would like to ask everyone to make a small decision in front of Jesus in

your heart. Jesus is very pleased and blessed by whatever you bring to Him. I pray that this year, we will all be able to deepen our fellowship with Jesus Christ and grow as His disciples. I also pray that we will be able to look up to Jesus Christ more and realize the "Kingdom of God" in this world even though we are in the midst of the plight of the Covid-19.