



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

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"The Case of the Big Meal" (Encounters with Jesus)

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**L**uke 9:10 On their return the apostles told Jesus all they had done. He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida.

Luke 9:11 When the crowds found out about it, they followed him; and he welcomed them, and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed to be cured.

Luke 9:12 The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place."

Luke 9:13 But he said to them, "You give them something to eat." They said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people."

Luke 9:14 For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, "Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each."

Luke 9:15 They did so and made them all sit down.

Luke 9:16 And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd.

Luke 9:17 And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up,

twelve baskets of broken pieces.

Luke 9:18 Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?"

Luke 9:19 They answered, "John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen."

Luke 9:20 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "The Messiah of God."

Many of us are enamored with detectives. We read detective novels, or watch detective TV shows like *Sherlock*, *Hawaii 5-0*, or my favorite right now on Netflix – *Crossing Lines*.

*Crossing Lines* is about detectives who work for the fictional International Criminal Court's Crime Unit. They are based in The Hague in the Netherlands so in the show they go all over Europe, crossing the lines of the international borders to solve crimes. Hence, it is beautifully shot as the good guys race all over Europe.

It is unlike any other crime show I've seen. In most shows the stars of the show don't die. But in this show (spoiler alert!), the show's regulars, the main stars with whom you start forming a bond, they don't always make it to the end of the season.

This would be like in *Hawaii 5-0*, in one episode Danny Williams dies; and then in another Kono dies; and then

in another Chin Ho Kelly, and then Steve McGarrett dies; and then in another the shave ice guy dies. What's his name? Yeah, Kamekona.

But in the show *Crossing Lines* (spoiler alert) the featured regular characters are dying right and left. Unheard of in American TV! You find yourself saying, "Oh no, not her....not him! No, don't open the door. Watch out behind the rock. Stay around for another season...one more show?...one more scene? No ....don't get in that car, oh too late!"

It keeps you at the edge of your seat because you really like the main characters and you don't know if they are going to make it. Hence, there is a greater sense of reality of the danger of what they are doing to solve crimes in their fight against evil. This is more like real life.

*Crossing Lines*. They are like real detectives who really understand life with its blessings and dangers. (Be glad I haven't started watching Korean drama, or else you'd be hearing about those too in my sermons.)

When it comes to studying the Bible, it really is helpful to be a detective. To the best of our abilities we need to be like a detective who is trying to figure out what it is really saying. It's not a Hollywood script. It's a book, which many of us would say is holy, which also means it has godly, real answers to life's real questions. It deals with life and death, and, unlike *Crossing Lines*, it isn't fictional.

**H**ence, don't read the Bible like a boring history book or a science book. Read it like a detective who is trying to find the answers to basically three things:

- What is God's character like?
- What is His power like?
- What does He want us to do?

Be a detective, when it comes to the Bible. These are three of the most important questions you can ask when reading the Bible. The Bible really gives us clues and commandments of how to live. And not to be overly dramatic, the seasons and episodes with Jesus really are about life and death and evil people and evil SUPERNATURAL forces out to get our loved ones and us.

Don't be passive when you read the Bible. Be active, inquisitive. It's great historical drama. And at times, we need to be crossing the lines of secular logic to understand God and what we are to do.

Think on this: What does a detective first do? She looks at the scene, the terrain, the geography, the location she is investigating. She looks for facts. Today's scene, or Bible passage, that we are investigating is in the Gospel of Luke in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter. It's the Case of the Big Meal And like they said in the old Dragnet TV show, the detectives would say, "We want the facts, ma'am, just the facts."

Fact number one: Other than the Resurrection, this story is the ONLY, the ONLY miracle that is recorded in all four gospels. The only one! Dun Dun. [Hear the soundtrack?] The only one! An alert detective should say – well, this means it is a super significant story, really important, other than the resurrection more so than any other miracle that Jesus did.

What's the setting? A Bible detective would say, look at the scene. Jesus is

in Capernaum. That's a large city. Jesus used Capernaum for His headquarters when He was in the area of Galilee. It's 60 miles north of Jerusalem. There was a big crowd following Jesus. But Jesus wanted to get away with just His disciples. Wouldn't we all want to get away after being with people all day?

So He gets into a boat to cross the Sea of Galilee, which is about four miles wide. The crowd can tell where His boat was heading to—a village called Bethsaida, on the lakeside. Bethsaida stretches across a plain of lush green.

Jesus gets to the other side with His disciples to relax, talk story, and recharge their batteries. But no, as detectives we figure out that the crowd in Capernaum is still following Jesus because they wanted to hear more from Jesus. The lake was four miles in diameter, and so they would have to walk the nine miles around to the top of the lake to Bethsaida where He was. Off they went. And as that crowd walked, other crowds start to join them along the trails, like on ramps to the freeway.

Suddenly the crowd grew from maybe a thousand to two thousand to three thousand to four thousand and higher and higher maybe up to 15,000 all walking briskly to hear and see this miracle man called Jesus. I said 15-thousand people may have been there. For many, this story is known as the feeding of the 5,000, so Pastor Dan, you missed it by 10-thousand!

But notice in this ancient Jewish male-dominated society they only counted 5,000 males in the story. It says in the text 5,000 MEN. But you and I know that there were probably women and children there. Women and children always respond to Jesus in large numbers. So if you were to add one woman and one child for every man, there were possibly 15,000 there! Surely more than just 5,000. Many scholars believe there were a lot more

than 5,000. Someone once told me that our driving range would hold 10-thousand people, so imagine 15-thousand in a huge open area.

The people finally arrive after a 9-mile walk and see that Jesus is in a huge green lush plain. As I said earlier, all four gospels recorded this event. Why? Clearly one of the main reasons is that it was a well-attended event. And what does this do for us detectives?

The scope of the audience means we have possibly up to 15,000 eyewitnesses. They would validate the existence of Jesus and that He performed a miracle. It might have been the most publicized miracle of Jesus' entire life. St. Paul says that 500 people saw the resurrected Christ after His death. But this could have been fifteen thousand!

The Gospels were written 30 to 40 years later and do you think if these documents were being read that someone there could say – "didn't happen, it was a fake." No, not if there were thousands of witnesses! This event helped validate Jesus and his supernatural ministry. But now, let's get back to our three questions for us Bible detectives: What is God's character like? What is His power like? What does He want us to do?

### **1) What is God's character like?**

Jesus sees the crowd approaching, and His heart goes out to them. He is sympathetic to them. They are probably tired and hungry after many of the have walked nine miles to get there! I find this incredible that Jesus would care about this. He is not some tough drill sergeant who says, so you are hungry well tough it out. You wanted to follow me, so buck up and show that you are a true disciple. No pain, no gain!

Instead, He shows compassion.

**T**hey have come so far. He wanted to take care of their hunger. I find it incredible that God would be so practical in wanting to feed them. What a host! What a heavenly host! Christianity is based on a compassionate God. Compassion is at His core.

Look at your Bible. What else does this story tell us about God's character in addition to Compassionate? It tells us that Jesus is sufficient for us. He will provide for our needs. He gives us enough meaning.

In this one incident Jesus is announcing that He as the Messiah is SUFFICIENT for all men and women and children. Follow Him and He will give you life and it is more than enough.

There is a story in the Bible, in the Old Testament, where God was leading the Israelites through the wilderness. They were hungry. So what did God do? God provided bread to fall from heaven. It was called Manna. It was like coriander seed. It was white and tasted like wafers made with honey (Ex. 16:31).

Manna saved the people from dying of hunger. But it couldn't keep. So they had to have faith that tomorrow God would do it again and give them bread. And so the saying came of "Manna for a day." God would always give us enough sustenance to make it for one more day.

You may be here today feeling like you are barely living on the fumes of faith. The financial pressure, the health challenges, the weariness of caring for loved ones or your business is just too much. You feel you can't make it. God promises that He will give you enough strength and insight for one more day. Manna for a day. Just a little more hope to make it one more day. One day at a time.

BUT get this. It also means we must

be able to admit that we are weak and He is strong. Can we confess that we lead insufficient lives without God? We need Him daily. We need His power and strength and guidance. If we admit our weakness, we can receive His power. In Hawaii we can say not only is Jesus the manna, He is also our *mana*—our power of spiritual authority.

It is how Jesus wants us to live today. Would we believe that Jesus would give us manna for a day? But more importantly in our story, Jesus is the bread! Jesus is showing the 5,000 plus people through the miracle that that you get Jesus Christ Himself, and not that you get bread and fish for one day. In the Gospel of John, Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty." (John 6:35)

Part of the takeaway for us today: Can we trust God daily? Can we trust that He will give us enough strength and faith for just one day? After that we will need His strength and leading tomorrow and then the day after that. One day at a time.

When we walk in a wilderness, it is a desolate place – no life, not much water or plants. That may be how you are feeling right now; like you're in a desert. But the Jewish prophets always said that "The Messiah will be the one who when He comes will feed us bread from Heaven."

There is a Jewish writing that is not in our Bibles, but was written between the Old and New Testaments times of writing. It is called Second Baruch, and it says, "In those days the Messiah will appear and feed them with bread from on high."

Liberal scholars will say, "Oh, the real miracle of this story is that selfish people opened up their hearts to share." But that would miss the point. The point is that Jesus was fulfilling

the prophecies of old as this is not about the miracle of humans, but that God came to earth to miraculously give us the food that we need. And that food is Jesus Himself – the Bread of Life. Notice I say the food that we NEED; not what we WANT. He doesn't have prime rib fall from the sky, but rather bread – an important daily staple of life.

Jesus is announcing – Hey do you know who I am? I'm the one who came from where the manna came from. I, as Creator, can bring something out of nothing. More importantly I am the manna that you need to survive in this world.

Does this really work? When we encounter Jesus, is He really sufficient? Does He make a difference?

As you know every year hundreds of our church members and thousand of people from 400 other churches attend the Hawaiian Islands Ministries annual conference called the HIM CONFERENCE. Every year HIM raises scholarship money for people in need. As in previous years, we give free conference tickets to military veterans who are working through PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). It is our way to help those who have come back from combat as they deal with the recovery back into civilian life. This recovery period often entails depression, lack of sleep, and anger, which then bleed into marriage and parenting issues. But PTSD does not only result from being in combat. For civilians it can also result from some emotional or physical trauma. Through worship, music, humor and instruction, the conference draws people close to Jesus. They meet Him. We want people to taste Him – the heavenly manna.

Does getting closer to Jesus make a difference? Like the feeding of the 5,000 men, 5,000 tickets were sold at the HIM Conference.

**W**ould these 5,000 find God compassionate through the conference and help them with their specific needs? Is Jesus sufficient? Let me read to you three notes I got from three families with veterans battling PTSD who attended the conference and encountered Jesus.

First one: "This was the first time I have seen joy in my husband since he returned from deployment four years ago. He was able to sleep for the first time without nightmares."

When I read this, I wanted to cry for appreciation for them and to God, the bread of heaven.

Here's another in relation to hearing Jesus' principles of parenting: "I got a lot of information on how to be a father to my 10-year old. I didn't know how to change my military style of relating to my wife and son."

And then a third note: "The HIM Conference was absolutely wonderful. I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart. I have not experienced a peace and joy in my heart like this since my life prior to my deployments. I have struggled with personal issues, marital issues, and spiritual issues, and it was only through Jesus Christ that I found peace. Peace that I cannot explain, but it wasn't until your conference where I could understand the word of God through this awesome spiritual gathering. Thank you, I continue on my journey and I will continue to be grateful to you.

In the midst of thousands, men and women felt the compassion and sufficiency of Christ. He met their individual needs in a way more than they could ever have imagined, that they now have more strength for the journey.

Jesus says in the Gospel of John 10:10b: "I came that they may have

life, and have it abundantly.

Ah, so there is a difference between Jesus and the manna in the Old Testament that is just enough for one day. Jesus is saying: When you know Me as the Bread of Life, then you have it ABUNDANTLY from Me. Yes, still trust Me daily, but what I give you is far more than what you read in the Old Testament. My manna is so much better than earthly bread. So with Me you just don't get a one single slice of bread. When you know me, there will be baskets and baskets and baskets left over.

So we learn that God's character is also generous!

### 1) What is His power like?

We discover that His power is immense! He can bring bread and fish out of nothing and feed 15,000 people with just five loaves and two fish. We think we are powerful, but not really compared to God.

We are told that a nuclear warhead is a thousandth of the power of a hurricane. The Bible says the Lord sits enthroned over the hurricane: The voice of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare; and in His temple all say, "Glory!" The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever. (Psalm 29:9-10)

God is powerful. Why wouldn't we want to follow Him? Be protected by Him? Be on His side? Tim Keller says it's like singing next to a great singer. You feel his or her power. Has that ever happened to you?

I am just an average singer. But I noticed when I have sung next to great singers like one of our worship leaders Leon Williams, or Cory Oliveros, they sang through me and around me, so yes, I sounded fantastic! I was amazing! Phenomenal! I become Pastor

Pavarotti! Somehow we blended, and I sounded richer than when I sang alone. That is kind of how it is with Jesus. When He and the Holy Spirit live inside of us, it's like we live a richer life through them.

### 1) What does God want us to do?

The interesting thing about Jesus is that He is not a narcissist who is so self-centered that He doesn't care about others. He is God. He is powerful, but He always wants other to be near Him and do His work with Him.

Lance Lopes told the story of when he taught others to play ukulele while in Cambodia on a mission trip. They didn't know how to do that at all or well. But when Lance played with them, they sounded great as they sang *How Great Is Our God!* Jesus is saying, I would like to make music with you—the music of ministry."

But often times we think, "My faith is my faith and I don't need to share with others. It's just Jesus and me!"

But our passage talks about that attitude. The disciples in our story say to Jesus, "Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place." (Luke 9:12)

Basically the disciples are saying, "Let the people find their own housing. As for food, they should find their own neighborhood L&L, Kozo Sushi, and Zippy's."

Jesus surprises them by saying, "YOU give them something to eat."

And they probably said something like, "Are you talking to us? You have got to be kidding! Look at all these people!" They are quoted as saying, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish – unless WE are to go and BUY FOOD for all these people."

It's like "Lord, we don't have a gift card to Whole Foods." But Jesus says, better than Whole Foods, let me show you Holy Foods. So Jesus made them sit in groups and then He took the loaves and fish and looking up to heaven He blessed them and broke them and gave them to the disciples to give to all the people. And everyone ate and was filled, and the leftovers were gathered and filled twelve baskets.

The story ends with Jesus saying, "So now, who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "You are the Messiah of God."

When Jesus asks us to do something, we better do it even if it is against great odds or when we don't want to be generous. He says to us when we see the needs of the world, "You give them something to eat." Nobody else but you. Not angels, but you. There is no plan B. And to do God's work, we have to put everything we have into His hands. We have to trust Him. We have to realize that God is only sufficient when we give up on our own sufficiency.

Jesus said, "You give them something to eat." That is why our purpose is to go out into the community and feed the people with the real bread of Life – Jesus. WE become His hands and feet and loving arms. We were always created to go out. The church exists to go out into the community and bring the presence of Christ to them. You give them something to eat.

We were never to be a club for members only, but a church. We came here to Ko'olau to buy a club so that we could become the church, for if we stayed at our old church, we would have become a club, for members only, since there was no more parking. It would have been for us alone. We always need to think about going out. You give them something to eat. And actually the best thing to give people

to eat is the bread of life. It's Jesus Himself.

When Jesus performed the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000, what does our passage say? He took the bread, broke it, blessed it, and gave it away. As the bread of life, Jesus was taken into our life here on earth. He was blessed and then broken on a cross, and then gave His life away for our sake.

When we follow Jesus, He takes us and blesses us. Then often we are humbled or broken, and then with the Spirit of God in us we then give our lives to God for others.

The true miracle is that we see God over and over and over again, day after day, for whenever we eat a piece of bread, we see Jesus. Look for Jesus, every day, every meal, every hour because you will see His miracles. The real miracle is when we have a heart that is always expecting miracles from God.

That is why we have a healing service next Sunday night. Will you come and expect a miracle that God may act on our issue whether emotional, spiritual or physical? Will you be open to the possibility of a miracle of healing in your life? Be at the healing service! Many come, and many are healed.

May we all be open to miracles from Christ for when we allow Christ to become the Lord of our lives. That is the greatest miracle of all. Amen? Amen. Let's pray.