

## “YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT”

Mark 6:30-44

You notice your husband is very tired, not his normal self. Then he begins to slur his words. You insist on him going to the hospital with you. As you rush to get him in the car, he begins to slump over. You get him to wake up again, and then half carry him into the emergency room. They ask you questions, put him on a gurney, and roll him into a room. You wait until the doctor comes in. He examines your husband. You ask the doctor, “What’s wrong?” He replies, “You take care of him.”

Yes, there is a health care crisis in our country, but even that sounds shocking. Yet, that is what Jesus might have sounded like to His disciples. Jesus and the disciples had gone in a boat to get to a quiet place to get away from the crowds. But the crowds ran ahead of them and got first to that quiet place. So Jesus began to teach the people. The disciples warned Jesus, “This is a remote place, and it’s already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” But Jesus, who was the one that attracted all these people in the first place, said to them, “You give them something to eat.”

“You give them something to eat.” Jesus has given similar commands to us—“Love one another.” “Let your light so shine before men.” “Love your enemies.” “Go into all the world and spread the good news to all creation.” “Who, us?” “Who, me?”

As a child I remember playing baseball with friends. We didn’t have a whole team of nine, so when we’d get up to bat, we’d make believe we were major league players. And we weren’t just any players. We wanted to be the best—Willie Mays, Mickey Mantle, Hank Aaron, Brooks Robinson, Roberto Clemente. It was our version of the “dream team.”

“American Idol” still is a popular TV show. Why? Because it involves amateurs. The show displays ordinary people who are energized by a dream. The more ordinary the winners, the more fun it is to see them win.

In 1976 the baseball world and many of those not really into baseball were talking about Mark Fidrych. Everybody loved this pitcher for the Detroit Tigers, not just because his ERA was under 2.5, but because of his mannerisms. Instead of a smooth athlete who looked the part of a major leaguer, Fidrych was awkward and in interviews was humble and pleasant. He was seen as an everyman, not a superstar, someone anyone of us could be.

That seems to be who Jesus called to follow Him—ordinary people like Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Nathaniel, Thaddeus, Matthew, James, Simon, and Judas. They were all amateurs. In fact on the stage called “salvation” the remarkable thing is that there is so little remarkable about the amateurs God called to play their parts. David was the runt of the litter. Mary was a young teen from an obscure village called Nazareth. Moses couldn’t speak clearly. Jacob was running away from trouble. Paul even persecuted the church. But you see when it comes to the Christian life, all of us are amateurs.

But those people were not just “amateurs,” they were also sinners. They’re people who annoy others, say hurtful things, and fail to help those in need. God doesn’t choose the “professionals” or the lovable ones.

Why choose sinful amateurs? When it comes to following Jesus, there is no professional training we can take, no credentials we have other than Jesus’ claim on us. What authorizes us is Jesus’ call to “Follow Me.” Our personal talents or how “good” we are is not what makes us disciples. Only Jesus’ call does that. None of us has the skills, the knowledge, or the inclination to make us anything other than amateurs when following Jesus, just as impossible as it was for the disciples to feed all those people. We consistently get it wrong. We mess up. That’s why we begin our worship each week with confession. We never get it right!

Yet it is this amateurism which is at the heart of the Gospel. This is how God works. Jesus offers salvation through a group of amateurs. The more we learn about Jesus, the more we realize how we mess up, fall short, and disappoint Jesus. The closer we get to Him, the farther we realize we are from Him. The more we learn about Jesus, the greater our amateur status.

We amateurs stumble behind Jesus. And He doesn’t want it any other way. It would be the height of stupidity to think of ourselves as religious professionals. None of us could say that we have the whole truth and are spectacularly adept at practicing our faith. Traditionally pastors receive communion first, not because we are better or more privileged, but we are chief among sinners!

Why does Jesus want amateurs? Because that way it is a matter of God’s grace, not our goodness. If we leave it up to us even a little bit, then all is hopeless. But if it is all up to Jesus, then there is total certainty for us.

All the disciples had were 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. “You give them something to eat? Go figure, Jesus.” Look at what amateurs have. But what did Jesus do with the 5 loaves and 2 fish? He fed the 5,000.

“Expect miracles,” is something Christians share with their friends. Did the disciples expect that when Jesus fed the 5,000? Do we expect that? The problem is not that miracles don’t happen, but that we look for the wrong one. The disciples had missed the greater miracle—that people had followed Jesus to that desolate place. Today miracles are around us. Kebede, our missionary in Ethiopia, shares with us how people in a land of starvation and poverty are coming to faith in Jesus. A child is baptized and receives the gift of eternal life. We receive Jesus’ true body and blood in Holy Communion. The very fact that you and I believe, that we are here as the people were by the Sea of Galilee to hear Jesus talk to us, is a miracle!

Jesus works through amateurs so it can be seen not as what to expect, but as a miracle, as coming only from God. The world reads Christians, not the Bible. What they can see in us is not a group of capable professionals, but stumbling amateurs who are blessed and led by Christ Jesus.