

## “Christ’s Faith in Us”

Luke 9: 10-17

Rev. Jody Andrade, June 21, 2026

Saint Luke’s Presbyterian Church

Today’s story of Dining with Jesus seems straightforward. Imagine the scene: thousands of people are gathered to hear Jesus speak. The sunlight begins to soften and stomachs begin to rumble. The disciples tell Jesus to disperse the crowd so they can find food and shelter and Jesus answers, “You give them something to eat.” And though there are only five loaves and two fish, the crowd eats their fill and there are 12 baskets of leftover bread when all is said and done.

It sounds like a straightforward miracle, another encounter with Jesus that doesn’t make mathematical sense. Our Vacation Bible School kids learned a saying this year: “Wow, God!” with fireworks hands. I’ll bet the disciples said, “Wow, God!” all the time!. We hear this story and we remember what it says on all those throw pillows at Home Goods, “With God, anything is possible.”

But this story about the *multitudes* is not straightforward; to the seasoned ear it contains *multiple* layers of coded language. Many of us already recognize the words on those Home Goods pillows. They’re a twist on what the angel says to Mary in Luke 1, “With God, nothing is impossible.” Likewise, this particular “Dinner with Jesus” story, the feeding of the five thousand, sounds familiar, in three distinct ways, to any Jewish person who grew up going to Temple.<sup>i</sup>

First, this feeding of a large crowd in the newly declared “city” of Bethsaida, which the disciples strangely label “a deserted place,” is a call back to the Moses story.<sup>ii</sup> In Exodus, after the Israelites are freed from Egypt, God finds a way to feed them in the desert. That sounds familiar.

Second, the multiplying of a few food items to feed a large crowd is a call back to the story in 2 Kings when the prophet Elisha feeds a crowd with very little food. That sounds familiar.

And third, the leftover food fills up 12 baskets, the same number as the tribes of Israel. That, too, sounds familiar.

And when Jesus takes the bread, looks up to heaven, blesses it, breaks it and feeds it to the people, his act foreshadows what will happen in the near future, when Jesus blesses and breaks the bread and feeds his followers during The Last Supper in Luke 22.<sup>iii</sup>

Why would this story, which is told no less than SIX times in the four gospels, be weighted with so much history, laced with so many layers of meaning? No one knows for sure, but there are certainly some likely possibilities.

In a time where there were no photographs, telephones, or internet, people relied on verbal and written stories for knowledge. The news was spreading about Jesus between the years 85-95 when Luke was written, and people had questions: WHO is this Jesus we keep hearing about but never met? WHAT exactly is he able to do? WHY should we believe these stories?

Hearing a story with familiar elements immediately endears it to us. It's part of who we are: we love to hear rhythms, look for patterns, and find meaning in the world.

For example: the disciples mislabeling this small city of Bethsaida as a "deserted place" paints the visual setting of a desert for listeners. This is the same environment through which the Jewish people wandered for years after escaping Egypt. This Jesus story, listeners think, takes place in one of "our places."

The number 12 is a special number to the Hebrew people. There were 12 tribes of Israel. Wouldn't you know there are 12 baskets of leftover bread? One Tupperware container for every single tribe. Is it a simple coincidence? Or does this Jesus story, listeners would wonder, connect him to our history, to the story of our people.

And how about this Jesus himself? We as a people know about the great Hebrew prophet Elisha, who lived 900 years before Jesus. Elisha healed the sick, raised the dead, performed miracles, and told God's people to take care of the needy and be faithful. Oh—and Elisha lived during a time of corrupt and cruel rulers. Does that sound familiar?

In one story, Elisha takes just twenty loaves of bread, feeds 100 people, and has some leftover. Hmmm. Today's scripture says Jesus didn't just feed 100 people with 20 loaves. He fed thousands with 5 loaves! So surely it follows that Jesus is not only equal to the great prophet, Elisha, he is something MORE than the great prophet Elisha. In fact, while Elisha lived a good, long life, Jesus' life was cut short by the ultimate sacrifice: he willingly died and was raised so we might now eternal life. What Elisha did here on earth, Jesus does throughout the cosmos: he invites us to live fully in the presence of God forever. To the temple member, this Jesus sounds like the real deal.

And thousands of years later, this morning, what I'd like to suggest to you, the good people of Saint Luke's, is there is even one more layer to this story. Because I think Jesus is challenging us, through his words, to take how we live as Christians one step further.

To have faith in him is amazing. It's life changing. But is it enough? Is it all he asks of us?

Recently I spoke with two different parents from two different families who share something in common: their older children don't want to be in church. Each of these two young people grew up happily attending everything, sometimes even waking up their parents to ensure they wouldn't be late on Sunday mornings. And then something changed.

Was it the timing of a world health crisis? Is it what Covid did to churches everywhere: barring us from the building, prohibiting us from gathering in formal or casual ways. Covid refused us the opportunity to strengthen our relationships with one another and with God. Maybe it was Covid.

Or could it be these young people turned from church as they've moved into a new stage of life? Did teenage doubts and questions snuff out the blind trust and unquestioning faith of their childhood? Has cynicism doused any non-scientific, non-provable idea? If they aren't in our pews, they don't hear Rev. David Lower's words at the communion table when he says, "All are welcome, those who doubt, those who have questions, those who are wrestling with the meaning of it all...."<sup>iv</sup>

Or perhaps these young people are disillusioned with the Christian brand? It sounds odd to say "Christian" and "brand" in the same phrase, but it's a reality. When someone professes to be a Christian these days, you cannot assume they define "saved by Christ" the same way as you. You cannot assume they want to treat the stranger as you would. Or that they think the same people should be fed at Christ's table. A "Christian" may not want certain people to even sit next to them in the pew. In fact, two self-identifying "Christians" can read the same Bible passage and hear a call to two completely different types of action.

Some Christians, the ones who speak the most loudly and often in the media, don't sound focused on loving every neighbor. Their words are far from the red letter sayings of Jesus.

To be honest, if what they say equals what "Christian" really means, I don't know that I'd want to go to church either.

Whether it's Covid or adolescent questioning or branding or a combination of all three, I can understand why we, the people who are the church, have lost some folks. And it breaks my heart. Because the life sustaining things that they need, community and purpose and unconditional love, are right here, in THIS church at least. But if they don't come, they can't discover it.

And so here is Jesus, in this story, telling the disciples, "YOU give them something to eat." The disciples have just returned from trips to other towns where they healed people and preached the good word. But now that they are back in Jesus' orbit, they have forgotten the imagination, the vision, the power

within their faith. They seek to solve a problem by asking Jesus to solve it for them.

And Jesus says, “It’s not enough to believe in me. You need to DO SOMETHING with that belief. The people are hungry. Don’t turn to me for the solution. Feed them. Feed their bodies so they may live. Feed their minds so they may know fully. Feed their hearts so they may believe!”<sup>v</sup>

Jesus alone is not feeding thousands of people. Jesus is equipping the saints, his followers, to do the work on behalf of the kingdom. Yes, we are *saved by faith*. But that is not enough, Jesus says. There’s another layer to living in my name. Next you must DO SOMETHING with that faith. He looks us in the eye and says, “YOU give them something to eat.”

How very sad to have a room full of saved people, all sitting in our own pews, staying in our own lanes, bouncing within our little bubbles, not sharing the good news with EVERY SINGLE PERSON IN THE WORLD! Because Jesus is not about you or me. Jesus is about ALL of us.

“Who is this Jesus?” they asked in the first century as they first listened to Luke. And today, many are asking, “Will this Jesus save us? Will he fix our problems, provide the solution, make it all better?”

This Jesus is telling us plainly “YOU give them something to eat.” YOU scoot over and make room in your pew. YOU ask somebody how they’re *really* doing today. YOU invite someone to worship or a church fellowship event. YOU speak up about what being a Christian means to you. Because if folks aren’t coming to worship with us, how else will they hear the good news?

During this dinner themed sermon series, invite some folks to meet you for dinner al fresco. After the meal is finished, push your chair back and tilt your head upward. Look up at the stars and marvel aloud at the glory of God’s world.

And when you order that banana split for dessert, ask for extra spoons for your friends. AND spoons for the next table. And the next. And one for the waiter, too. Because there’s no limit to God’s abundance.

And when you've eaten every last bite, from banana to whipped cream, don't be surprised to discover extra cherries on top, 12 to be exact. More than enough to share with everyone you meet.

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> *The New Interpreter's Bible, A Commentary, Vol IX*, ed. Leander E. Keck, et. al., Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995, p. 197.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> See the recording of Saint Luke's worship service June 7, 2026, minute 46.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xt82Bclo5Bw&list=PLMc5RWinagP-EMohgA9dEg1MAaOPZ1v63&index=3>

<sup>v</sup> Phrasing inspired by *Meeting Jesus at the Table: A Lenten Study* by Cynthia M. Campbell and Christine Coy Fohr. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2023, p. 58-59.