

Luke 9:10-17
Open to the Impossible
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Come on, be realistic. Will you just listen to reason? (Shhh, I'm listening to reason). I know God can do wonderful things but... (there again, the power of prepositions). I know God could do something, but my need... well it's just too much. Can you hear the even the faintest echo of your own voice in these words? Or maybe it's loud and clear.

When I was growing up, my grandpa used to keep a little notebook in his car. And every time he went on a pastoral call he would record his mileage; every time he met a parishioner for breakfast, or paid for parking at the hospital he would record the transaction. He called it his "write-off" book. These were the things he could write-off on his tax forms. We tend to keep a different type of write-off book in our hearts. On its pages, that person who just seems beyond repair; that situation that seems impossibly entrenched; that dream we've given up on and decided to stop dreaming. We accept our circumstances, because at least they're not as bad as another, and we tuck our spiritual write-off books to the shelves of our hearts.

If this is resonating with you, I want to invite you this morning to take your dreams, your longings, your prayers that've not yet been answered off the shelf and dare to give them to Jesus. Because what looks impossible in our hands, is more than enough to work with in the hands of the savior. And since what I just said resonates with every single one of you, I want to invite you to stand with me in an act of protest against discouraged and defeatist faith, and stand upon the authority and inspiration that this book is not only true, but it is liveable. Listen to God's Word from Luke 9:10-17.

On their return the apostles told him all that they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida. ¹¹When the crowds learned it, they followed him, and he welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing. ¹²Now the day began to wear away, and the twelve came and said to him, "Send the crowd away to go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find lodging and get provisions, for we are here in a desolate place." ¹³But 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." ¹⁴For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each."¹⁵ And they did so, and had them all sit down. ¹⁶And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. ¹⁷And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

We left off last week with Jesus sending the disciples, empty handed and vulnerable, into the villages, with only the Kingdom of God on their tongues. Even though they lacked material provisions, what they had was the transformative and healing Word of God. Now they've returned, no doubt surprised and exhilarated by the signs and wonders they had seen and done. And now they're ready to take the region by storm. "Hey, let's go grab Jesus and keep going, nothing's going to stop us now." Instead however, Jesus says, not so fast, first let's get away for some quite R&R.

Is this not a prophetic word to the Church in America today?

There is underlying anxiety among so many Churches, if we don't work as hard, innovate as rapidly, keep our identity fresh and constantly in people's faces, we will lose market share—we'll become irrelevant. We want Jesus to keep up with us. What Jesus does however, is he completely derails their momentum, something that seems totally counter-intuitive to our ears. But why?

Jesus knew that the disciples needed physical and spiritual rest at times of exhilaration and success as much as in times of frustration.

You know how hard that is, when things are rolling the last thing you want to do is slow the momentum. But being present to God and slowing down doesn't halt the momentum, rather it keeps you in rhythm with the one whose mission we're a part of in the first place. They were not just getting away *by* themselves, but they were getting away *for* themselves. Come away so that you can experience in yourself what God has done in others. As one author puts it: Jesus says to the disciples: "Come away and let God love you and do the miracle in you."

And what miracle is that? The miracle of control and result hungry people like you and me trusting that it all belongs and is being guided by the God who has it all under control.

Listen, the challenges, the heartaches, the opportunities we face every day require a tremendous amount of openness and faith to not grow weary—or worse cynical. The only way we stay open to all of the wonder and potential of God is with daily renewal. Re-centering ourselves and reminding ourselves I'm not in control as much as I would like to think. Because the only way we can be recognizers of the divine and enablers of the impossible, is if we practice that daily impossible possibility of walking, hoping, depending on Jesus alone.

However, like my children who come charging down the stairs at 6:15 every morning, while I'm right in the middle of my time of renewal, which is always aided by a cup of good coffee. It says that the crowds came to him. And instead of shooing them away he taught them and healed them. It may only take a few moments a day, but in them we are reminded that with Jesus, people are never distractions. Jesus liberates us from those relentless little dictators, and I'm not talking about the ones in Barbie or Batman pajamas. I'm talking about our schedules, our to-do lists. As I said a few weeks ago, when I quoted CS Lewis: distractions don't get in the way of all the great things I need to get done, but they are real life that God is sending to us day-by-day.

Then Luke says that **the day began to wear away, and the twelve came and said to him, "Send the crowd away to go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find lodging and get provisions, for we are here in a desolate place."**

Was this genuine concern for the physical wellbeing of the crowd, or their desire to get away from the pressing needs of the people for a while? Whatever their motives, what we see here are 12 men who survey the physical surroundings and determine, there's not feasible way.

Oh, how well we know this response. The challenge before us is too great, we'd better take the practical and pragmatic path—at least it's well-worn. 5,000 people are here and its getting late, better choose the path of least resistance (which is also the least opportunity). Better to send them

home for their supper, and trust that they'll all get fed, than to risk the possibility that Jesus might do something miraculous with this congregation. It's better to stay put in the doldrums of that job you don't like, even though it pays the bills, than to pursue that dream you believe God placed in your heart. It's better to accept good enough is good enough for your life, for your family, for this church, than to bet the house on the possibility that there may just be horizons of God's blessing and mercy and grace you didn't know existed because you didn't have the courage to step out from that which you could control, to the place that was precisely beyond your control—or as we call it, faith.

We see this even in the ways that we have tried to explain this passage. There are many explanations for what happened here. Some say that one little boy's generosity in giving up his lunch created the miracle of influence, that when everyone saw him share his little, they took their little, and all had some. Sweet idea, but I think it misses the mark, or should I say, misses the Luke. Others say that Jesus broke the five loaves, and because people were satisfied with the spiritual bread he had given them in message, they were no longer in need of physical food. Again, I think it's an evasion.

I believe the point here is that Jesus did the miraculous, he received the little that was given, and in the hands of Jesus a little gift, a little faith, a little sacrifice can become the miraculous. Did you notice how Jesus instructed them? When they realized the dilemma that was before them Jesus simply said: "You give them something to eat."

You have before you and within you what it takes to reveal the Kingdom, meet the need, do the impossible. If you will move beyond the limits of your thinking let Jesus do what he always wants to do, reveal the impossible possibility of life with him.

If you look at the facts and figures before us there is an interesting idea. 5,000 is a lot, this probably didn't even include women and children, because they were often not included in a count like this. So it could have been 10,000 or it could have been 15,000. For all intents and purposes it was a number that was so great, it was beyond their comprehension. And 7 (5 loaves, 2 fish) in the bible 7 is the number of perfection, or the number of completion, but perhaps it is also the number of finiteness. 7 completes things. But as one author put it, Jesus always counts to 8.

Jesus is inviting you take what you have and give it to him as you step forward out into the unknown of life in faith. When you've prayed over that dream and it seems like there's no earthly way, give what you have to Jesus, and remember that he was only half human anyways—the other half was divine, otherworldly.

I want to share a story with you that happened this week in this church. As many of you know we just spent the month of May and June completing a major repair to the boiler system below fellowship hall. It was a major project that had a major price tag. And it is only a part of a larger project that we have been preparing for over the last 3 years, with architectural studies, preservation learning experiences, and soon feasibility studies that will help us set responsible and realistic goals for fundraising.

Well I spend a lot of time around you people, and don't think I haven't noticed your hand-wringing, the beads of sweat that begin to form on your brow, or the anxiety in your voice when we start talking about this challenge. I am familiar with this anxiety too, it keeps me up at night too. I've never done something like this, but I believe that we are doing our part, we are working hard, we are

working patient, and we are working smart. We are putting our 5 loaves and 2 fish in the hands of the savior.

Well this week, as Jessica, myself, and the Finance Committee were tallying the last few bills from the Fellowship Hall project, and unfortunately, we came in over what we had anticipated. However, that very same day I received a phone call from Wells Fargo Wealth Management informing me that Wabash Presbyterian was listed as the beneficiary of a Memorial Trust from a member from long ago. And due to restructuring they were in the process closing out the trust and issuing a lump-sum disbursement to the beneficiary, a disbursement that covered this particular project's cost of 145,000, and even left twelve baskets left over.

Tell me that you don't believe that God is going to supply every need we have, for this project, this church. Wabash Presbyterian Church is not circling the wagons, there's no Coriolis Effect going on here. God still has Kingdom ministry work for you to do, and the challenges we face will be supplied as we step out in faith.

Do you believe that God is still in the business of the miraculous? More importantly, are you open to the impossible? Because even a little in the hands of Jesus is enough. Your little bit, my little bit, give him what you've got because it's enough.