

Jesus turns to the disciples and says, “You give them something to eat.”

Of course, the disciples can see that feeding so many people would be impossible. All they can find is five barley loaves and two fish. But then, Jesus gets them to see what’s there with new eyes. The disciples are coming from a place of fear, of scarcity: there will never be enough! Six month’s wages would not buy enough bread to feed them! What Jesus shows us is that, whatever we have, whatever God has already given us, is always enough. If we look at it in the right way. If we decide to share. If we let go of our fear and stop holding onto to what’s “ours” so tightly. If we can do those things, we absolutely have enough bread to feed the whole world.

And, it turns out, to throw a really big party. A picnic with everyone spread out on the grass, enjoying the sunset on the lakeshore and the cool evening breeze. There’s plenty for everyone, and more left over besides. This is a pretty compelling picture of what the Kingdom of God is like.

This story about feeding the five thousand is, in a way, the first supper, a foretaste of the last supper. Jesus sat down and broke bread with his friends many times over the course of his ministry, not just that last night in the upper room. Every time Jesus broke bread with friends, it was a thanksgiving meal.

Jesus follows the same pattern at this first supper as he does at the last supper. “Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.” Take, bless, break, give: those are the actions of the eucharistic feast, our Communion service. Jesus wants us to take what we have, whatever it is, whatever’s already here, and bless it: in other words, give it to God. And then break it open, divide it up, and give it away. Joyfully. So that all will have enough.

Jesus does this with bread, every time he shares a meal. And he does this with his life: lives it for God, breaks it open, gives it to us. And this is what Jesus wants with our lives too: You give them something to eat. It’s not enough to simply pray that God will change things, will feed the hungry and clothe the naked. God needs us to participate in this eucharistic action. God is calling us to take our lives, and bless them, and be broken open, and then given away in service of others.

Take, bless, break, give. No matter how hard or impossible this seems, the end result is worth it: everyone ate until they were satisfied, and when they gathered up what was left over, they filled twelve baskets. This vision is possible. We already have what we need, right here in our midst. The Kingdom is waiting to be born. We just need to join in the feast.