

YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT

Luke 9:10-17

Key Verse: 9:13a

"He replied, 'You give them something to eat.'"

Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 is recorded in all four Gospels as the climax in Jesus' public ministry. This event well depicts that Jesus is God who shepherds his people. Luke abbreviates many details of this event compared with other gospels. He expounds more directly that Jesus is the Messiah who came to this world to save his people from their sins. Luke also emphasizes that Jesus is God who coworks with his people.

First, Jesus welcomes them (10-11).

When the apostles returned from fieldwork training, they reported to Jesus what they had done (10a). Here the Twelve are called "apostles" because they were sent out to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God. Usually worldly ambassadors look pompous. In contrast, the disciples of Jesus looked humble and hungry. But they received glorious mission to proclaim the gospel of Jesus. From God's perspective, the disciples are so great that their names were inscribed on the twelve walls of the holy City of God, which had twelve foundations (Rev 21:14).

One day Jesus sent them out for evangelistic fieldwork training. At that time, Peter was not quite sure about the kingdom of God. Anyway, he was sent out to preach the kingdom of God. Now they were having a joyful report session. Most likely Peter said, "Lord, when I preached the kingdom of God, many repented of their sins and accepted living hope in the kingdom of God." Bartholomew, a man of few words, even spoke up, "Lord, when I laid my hand on the sick, many were healed." It is amazing to know that the disciples experienced the power of faith when they depended on God only. At that time, the disciples were tired after the exhausting evangelistic fieldwork training. They needed time to eat and take some rest. As for Jesus, before the crucifixion, he had to spend sufficient time with the disciples to explain the meaning of his suffering, death and resurrection. This is why Jesus withdrew with his disciples to a town called Bethsaida, which was situated north of Lake

Galilee and east of the Jordan River (10). John describes the locality as being in the high mountains, the high land on the other side of the lake from Capernaum (Jn 6:3). This time, Jesus preferred a lonely place where the mountains might possibly conceal them from the searching eyes of the crowd.

Was this retreat possible? No! A large crowd of people watched their movement very carefully and followed him and came to the place where Jesus wanted to have a staff conference (11). They were, in a sense, shameless people, because they hindered Jesus' plan to have a staff conference. But the crowd of people felt that they had an absolute privilege to come to Jesus, because they believed that Jesus was their shepherd. Because of the crowd of people, the staff conference was greatly disturbed and canceled.

What did Jesus do with them? Luke says in verse 11b: "He welcomed them." It is indeed amazing that Jesus welcomed the crowd who came even to the place where he had hoped to have a staff conference. This one event sufficiently reveals that Jesus is God incarnate and a good shepherd. He welcomes anybody, anytime. He is full of grace and truth (Jn 1:14). To welcome people who are not invited is not easy at all. King David was a man after God's own heart (Ac 13:22). But he could not welcome his son Absalom who just returned to his father David from exile. David's prestige as king could not tolerate seeing him face to face.

Jesus is the holy God. So he cannot welcome sin-stained people. But Jesus welcomed a large crowd of people. Jesus welcomed a wayward Samaritan woman. Jesus welcomed a selfish tax collector, Levi. Jesus welcomed a blind man, Bartimaeus, and wiped the tears from his eyes (Mk 10:49). In this case, Jesus is like the father in the parable of the prodigal son. After squandering all he had, the son decided to come back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him (Lk 15:20). Here we learn that Jesus welcomes anybody and everybody who comes to him. We must come to Jesus when we are weary and tired, because he is waiting at the door to welcome each of us (Rev 3:20).

Second, Jesus preached to them the kingdom of God (11).

Look at verse 11b. "He welcomed them and spoke to them about the

kingdom of God...." Jesus knew that they worked hard pummeling themselves and made some money, thinking that they could buy happiness with money. But it did not work. So they despaired. Some despaired because of their sins.

When they came to Jesus he did not try to solve their minor details of life. Rather, Jesus preached to them the kingdom of God so that they might solve their fundamental life problem, because those who believe the good news of the kingdom of God can be free from demon possession. Those who believe in the good news of the kingdom of God can have a living hope amid despaired people. To Jesus, what they really needed was not the satisfaction of their emotional feelings, but the good news of the kingdom of God. That is really true, because it gives man eternal life. Yasunari Kawabata was the first Japanese to receive the Nobel Prize in literature. When he had accomplished his hope, he had no more hope. He despaired despite his fame and wealth. As Kierkegaard (1813-1855) predicted, "despair leads to death," so Mr. Kawabata committed suicide. There are many people similar to him. Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) was a typical American. He depicted rugged American individualism so well that his works characterized America as a nation of rugged individualism. Moreover, he is an inventor of American English. British English was based on aristocratic sophistry in an attempt to dignify the writers. But Hemingway wrote in a way that the reader can understand very well. His English was simple and beautiful and focused on the topic. His English became American English. Now it is becoming the international English. He was one of the recipients of the Nobel Prize in literature. But when he became a man of wealth and fame, despair made him powerless. Then demons came into him. They tortured him until he committed suicide with his hunting rifle.

Mr. Hemingway's problem was that he did not know the good news of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is man's living hope and the final goal of all mankind. The kingdom of God gives all men eternal life through Jesus, because it was rehabilitated by the blood of Jesus. Jesus was so happy to shepherd his people that he did not know the day was wearing away, and his twelve disciples were there with great patience.

Third, "You give them something to eat" (12-14a).

When the western horizon was turning from red to dusky purple, the

Twelve came to Jesus and said, "Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here." In contemporary terms, they said, "Let them take care of themselves." The disciples were very realistic. But to Jesus, their individualism was sheer irresponsibility. When the Twelve said to Jesus, "Send them away...", they must have added, "The earlier the better, sir." Their suggestion was reasonable and the best expediency.

What did Jesus say to them? He said, "You give them something to eat!" What an impossible command! Through this command, Jesus teaches his disciples several things that God's people must learn.

First lesson, to have a sense of responsibility (13). To Jesus, whether or not they could feed the 5,000 did not matter. What mattered was whether they had a sense of responsibility or not. Jesus did not condone the Twelve's irresponsibility. Jesus did not justify their excuse that they could not feed them simply because they had no bread. Jesus pressed them hard to come to know a sense of responsibility. A sense of responsibility is a basic element to master as a child of God. How then can we have a sense of responsibility? A sense of responsibility comes when we love God. For example, after the resurrection Jesus asked Peter the same question, "Do you love me?" three times consecutively, until Peter was hurt. But Peter said, "You know that I love you." Then Jesus said, "Feed my sheep" (Jn 21:17). When Jesus said to Peter, "Feed my sheep," Jesus was urging Peter to be responsible for his sheep. Peter was the last person who could take care of Jesus' sheep because of his hot temper. But because he loved Jesus, Peter became the best shepherd who cared for Jesus' sheep under fiery persecution in the early days of Christian faith.

Second lesson, to experience the power of faith (13). When Jesus said, "You give them something to eat," he wanted his disciples to experience the power of faith. For example, when Jesus said, "You give them something to eat," they answered, "We have only five loaves of bread and two fish." They despaired because they did not have such a huge amount of bread to feed the crowd. They had basic faith. But they had never experienced the power of faith. When

they were in an adverse situation they only depended on human Jesus. This time, Jesus demanded them to be responsible for feeding the crowd of 5,000. But the disciples were utterly powerless. They were like flat tires. Still, Jesus wanted them to experience the power of faith by obeying the command, like the servants who filled the jars to the brim at the wedding at Cana in Galilee (Jn 2:7-10). The disciples said to themselves, "Jesus decided to give us a hard time." That was not the case. Jesus wanted them to experience the power of faith. Without experiencing the power of faith, no one can be useful to God. After the Exodus, God did not give his people Israel the promised land right away, as they had expected. Instead, God led them into the wilderness first, to overcome unbearable hardships. Then God led them to fight and conquer enemies in the promised land so that they might experience the power of faith.

Third lesson, to have the shepherd heart (13). Jesus said, "You give them something to eat." He said this to teach them the shepherd heart of God. What is shepherd heart? Shepherd heart is the heart of God. In his shepherd heart, God gave his one and only Son to save men from their sins. Therefore, Jesus teaches us that to have a shepherd heart is the supreme obligation for the children of God. Jesus said in John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

There have been innumerable great men and women in history. But most people agree that Moses stands out as the most eminent leader, for he had a shepherd heart for his people, 600,000 Israelites. Moses' task from God was to deliver his people from bondage in Egypt and lead them to the very entrance to the promised land flowing with milk and honey, and die. Despite his 40 years of hard work, God did not give him the privilege of stepping on the promised land. But he did not feel sorry for himself even though he had received 80 years of training and then served God for 40 years to deliver his people and to train his people in the wilderness. He felt very sorry for his people if they would be like sheep without a shepherd in the wilderness. Moses prayed, crying many tears, saying, "May the Lord, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community...so the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd" (Nu 27:15-17).

Fourth, Jesus let his disciples participate in feeding the 5,000 (14b-17).

Look at verse 14b. "But he said to his disciples, 'Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.'" Jesus is God. But he was not a one-man show. He wanted his disciples to participate in the glorious event of feeding the 5,000 people. The Twelve heard, "Have them sit down." They could have said that it was not necessary to prepare the table when there was no bread. Anyway, they obeyed his command (15). They were happy to participate in Jesus' ministry. They worked hard to make people sit down 50 by 50 with 5,000 men. What a humble participation! But to participate or not to participate in God's history makes a big difference in a person's life.

What was the result? Look at verse 16a. "Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them." Jesus thanked God for the five loaves and the two fish and for his blessing. Then a miracle happened. Verse 17b says, "...and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over." God's blessing was overflowing. May God speak to each of us, "You give them something to eat." May God grant us a sense of responsibility.