

Matthew 15:37

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[0 : 00] I can't get no satisfaction.

Mick Jagger's language may well be more sexually charged than Freddie Mercury's. There must be more to life than this that we made reference to this morning. But I suspect they're both coming from a very similar place.

I think the sentiments expressed really reflect something very, very similar. Just reflecting, it's good that there are only two services.

We've gone from Freddie Mercury to Mick Jagger, the Mind Boggles, where we would end up if we had a third service. But the sentiments that we find in these words are sentiments that speak of a lack of satisfaction, fulfillment.

In life. What about Aberdeen, here where God has placed us? What about the neighborhood in which our building is located here in Rosemount?

[1 : 13] How many of our largely unknown neighbors can identify with this frustrated cry of protest?

I can't get no satisfaction. I try and I try and I try and I try, but I can't get no satisfaction.

I want this evening to focus on a simple matter-of-fact statement that we find in Matthew's account of Jesus' feeding of the 4,000.

We find it there in Matthew chapter 15. And towards the end of the passage in verse 37.

They all ate and were satisfied. They all ate and were satisfied. These very simple words constitute a beautiful summary of an amazing day.

[2 : 18] They all ate and were satisfied. Now, you might respond to me as you see the use that I'm making of these words.

You might say, well, really, all that's being said there is that they were hungry. Physically hungry. They'd been there for three days, as Jesus explains.

Whatever provisions they'd brought had run out. They were hungry. And they were provided with food. They ate. They were filled. They were satisfied. And certainly that is what is being said.

But I think we are entitled to understand or use the expression that we find here more broadly. If we think of the events recorded in the passage read, we know that the multitudes that are being spoken of, the all of verse 37, they weren't only fed.

We know that many of them were healed. We read of that in the passage. We've read of how all of them were amazed as they witnessed the power of Jesus. We're told that all of them praised the God of Israel.

[3 : 26] So, even if we limit ourselves to what is explicitly said in the passage, we can legitimately speak of these people as people who were satisfied in a much broader way than simply having their hunger satisfied.

Their hunger pangs dealt with, though that clearly is what did happen and what specifically is being spoken of in those words.

They all ate and were satisfied. Well, I think we can go further than simply say, well, these people clearly were satisfied by Jesus at a number of levels.

We can go further and see in these words, but perhaps more accurately, in the miracle itself, a sign of a wonderful spiritual reality.

Namely, the work of Jesus in people's lives. They all ate and were satisfied. Let's not forget that the purpose of the miracles, one of their principal purposes, was to serve as a sign.

[4 : 39] They also served to satisfy the hunger of thousands of people on this occasion. But of greater significance, and it's the Bible itself that presents the miracles in these terms, is that they serve as a sign telling us about Jesus and about His purposes and about His power.

And here, very specifically, His power, His capacity, His ability to satisfy the dissatisfied. They all ate and were satisfied.

What about our city? What about our neighborhood? There's a curious demographic parallel that I want to point out or highlight.

And even before I do it, I'm not claiming there's a huge significance to this, but it's a curiosity. Matthew tells us here in the passage that 4,000 adult men were fed.

There in verse 38, we're told the number of those who ate was 4,000 besides women and children. So, the implication is clear that the 4,000 relates to adult men.

[5 : 53] In addition to the adult men, women and children were also fed. The total number, we simply don't know. On the assumption that there would have been more adult men in all probability there than women, let's double it.

It's a rough estimate. Let's double it and say about 8,000 people were fed on this occasion. Now, the curiosity is that the population of Rosemount, the neighborhood of this city where we are located, is something approaching 8,000.

It's just a coincidence. There isn't a huge significance to that, but it struck me as quite a sobering coincidence. 8,000 people all satisfied.

All satisfied with Jesus. Isn't that a wonderful vision for us? 8,000 people satisfied with Jesus who went home to tell their families about Jesus and all that Jesus had done.

The healings that He had done, the way they had been fed, the miracle that they had seen. And they told them about how they praised the God of Israel. 8,000.

[7 : 04] They all ate and were satisfied. And as I was thinking about this curious coincidence, it led me to think in rather sobering terms or in a rather sobering mood about how many folk in our neighborhood, here in Rosemount, have found satisfaction in Jesus through the ministry of Bonacore, of our congregation.

How many? How many would say, yes, it was through that church, through those believers, through that congregation, that I came to find satisfaction for my hungry soul in Jesus?

I don't know how many. I don't think it's very many. And we've got a long way to go before we reach 8,000. We can certainly say that with great confidence. Well, let's take that as a challenge as we enter into considering this passage.

You know, where to start if we're conscious that we're away from being anywhere near to that reality. Well, where to start? We've got to start somewhere. Where to start?

Well, let's start for this evening with this passage. But I want us to have, as we look to the passage, to have this aspiration, this goal, this vision of men and women, boys and girls in this neighborhood, and we can extend it beyond our circles of influence.

[8 : 30] Don't, for many of us, extend really geographically here in this part of the city. It goes beyond this neighborhood. But thinking of our opportunity to bring good news that can lead to men and women being satisfied with Jesus, let's have that as our aspiration, if that's the best way of putting it.

Is it possible? Is that something that we really can do? Is it maybe naive to take a passage like this, to identify this, in the grand scheme of things, insignificant coincidence, and draw from it a vision for today, for Rosemont, for Aberdeen?

Some might say, well, yes, that happened then. But everything's changed. Everything's different. Or is it? Has everything changed?

Is everything different? Well, let's think of the major elements here in the event that is recorded for us. Jesus.

Has Jesus changed? What are we particularly drawn to? What does Matthew particularly highlight concerning Jesus in this passage very swiftly?

[9 : 52] At the heart of what we find concerning Jesus surely is His compassion. He Himself identifies, declares, testifies to His compassion for the people.

There in verse 32, I have compassion for these people. This is actually the only occasion, together with the parallel account in Mark, recording the same occasion, that Jesus takes these words onto His own lips.

He's often described as having compassion. But here we have the only occasion where He Himself declares in this way, I have compassion for these people.

Compassion was the distinguishing feature of His character. No other emotion is so often mentioned in reference to Jesus than His compassion.

And I'll insult you with a question before moving on. Has He changed? Is He any less compassionate today than He was when He acted in the way recorded for us here?

[10 : 59] His compassion. His power. The passage speaks volumes of His power. All who were healed of a multiplicity of illnesses and diseases.

The bread and the fish that were multiplied. This amazing miracle, creative miracle. Has His power changed? Well, again, forgive me for such an insulting question.

His ability to satisfy. Has that in any way lessened? Is He less able to satisfy today than He was then? Jesus hasn't changed.

What about the people? Maybe the people have changed. Are folks already satisfied? Is that the reality? If we were to have the opportunity to know how people were, the 8,000 people who live in this neighborhood, would we find that largely they're satisfied?

Or would we find people who are lonely and isolated, who don't know what life is about, who aren't happy, who aren't satisfied, many of them.

[12 : 10] Have people really changed? Do people now no longer have a need for Jesus like they did then? Well, again, I'm conscious. The folly of the questions, you know, are the answers.

As we think about the people that we are called to reach with the good news, I want to just pause and note another curious parallel between the crowds fed, as it's recorded for us here, and the crowds that surround us.

An interesting aspect of this miracle is that the crowds fed were Gentiles. Gentiles. In Matthew's gospel, we don't have a precise geographic reference, but in the parallel passage in Mark's gospel, in chapter 7, in verse 31, we're given a more precise geographic reference, and it identifies the location of this miracle on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, the region of the Decapolis.

Now, that was Gentile country. So, the people here, it's entirely reasonable to conclude and presume, were Gentiles. That's reinforced by the manner in which they're described as being amazed and praising the God of Israel.

Now, that in itself wouldn't confirm that they were Gentiles, but it certainly reinforces the geographic reference. Here were Gentiles, and they're praising the God of Israel. What a remarkable thing.

[13 : 35] They're praising thousands of Gentiles, praising the God of Israel. Now, what do I say the parallel is? Well, what I'm saying is that these people, even in the day of Jesus, they were outsiders.

They weren't part of the church community. They weren't part of the people of God. They were outsiders. They were pagans. They knew nothing of the God of Israel. They had no loyalty to the God of Israel.

And yet, they are the ones who are fed. They are the ones who are satisfied. And in that sense, it's not so different for us as we would seek to reach those who surround us.

So, Jesus hasn't changed. The people haven't changed. So, what has changed? Well, maybe the disciples. Could that be the issue? Is that the missing link, if you wish?

The reason why so few are satisfied, or given the opportunity even to be satisfied with Jesus? I don't know.

[14 : 36] I'm posing the question. You see, the disciples were involved. And we look at this passage and we say, well, really, it was all about Jesus. It was His power. He's the one who did the healing.

He's the one who performed the miracle. And, of course, that's true. But the disciples were involved. Jesus involved them in bringing satisfaction to these men, women, and children.

Just to illustrate that, just imagine for a moment, a wee boy, part of the crowd. He's starving.

Three days, his dad took him to hear this rabbi. And they took a picnic, but that had run out. And this wee boy, he is seriously hungry. And one of the disciples comes in and gives him bread and fish.

Let's say it was Philip. Part of what we're told here. Jesus performed the miracle, passed on the bread and the fish, and the disciples distribute.

[15 : 37] You can imagine it. So Philip, let's say it was Philip, he hands this food to this wee boy. Now, just imagine if you had the opportunity to go up to that wee boy and say, hey, wee boy, who fed you?

What would the wee boy say? Would he say, it's that guy, Jesus? No, he wouldn't say that. He would say it was that guy. I don't know his name. He's the one who fed me. You see, the disciples were involved in providing for the multitudes.

Jesus involved them. So let's learn from the disciples. I find it quite encouraging in a way to be asked to learn from the disciples.

We're often challenged, rightly so, that we are to be like Jesus. And that is true. And ultimately, we will become like Jesus. But sometimes that just seems so difficult.

But tonight, I'm not going to challenge you to be like Jesus. Important though that is. Something more doable, more reachable. Let's be like the disciples.

[16 : 42] Ordinary, flawed, fallible, selfish, irritable. We could go on, folks, like you and me. But men who partnered with Jesus to bring satisfaction to hungry men and women.

Now, we can do that. If they could do that, we can do that. What were they doing that made them useful as partners of Jesus? Let's just go through some things that we can draw from the passage that I think are relevant to their usefulness as partners of Jesus.

First of all, they were following Jesus. The passage takes that as a given. From verse 29, we're given the itinerary, as it were, of Jesus' movements.

We're following on, really, from the miracle we were thinking about last week when Jesus and the disciples had been in Tide of Sidon. They now head over the northern point of the Sea of Galilee and come down the eastern border or side of the sea into this Gentile territory.

But, of course, the disciples are following Jesus on this journey. They're there with Him. They're following Him. It's a very simple and almost insulting point to make.

[17 : 57] But they had to be there to partner with Him. Imagine if one of the disciples had said, well, I'm going to take the weekend off. I've got things to do in Capernaum. I'll head to Capernaum for the weekend and then I'll rejoin Jesus next week.

Would that disciple have been involved? Well, of course, he wouldn't have been involved. It was those who were following Jesus who were involved in blessing others. And, of course, following Jesus involved seeing the work that Jesus was doing.

They were witnesses to the manner in which He healed all these men and women who were brought with this multiplicity of diseases. And as they saw Him at work, as they witnessed His compassion, as they witnessed His power, so that fed their faith.

And so they were ready and willing to partner with them in what might seem a very insignificant way and yet an important way in satisfying these crowds.

They were following Jesus. They were listening to Jesus. They heard Jesus when He said, as He directs His words to them. There in verse 32, words we've already commented on.

[19 : 07] I have compassion for these people. They've already been with me for three days and have nothing to eat. I don't want them to go away hungry and collapse on the way.

I have compassion for these people. And the disciples were listening. They were hearing what Jesus had to say. And as they listen, so they begin in a measure to understand and share in something of the compassion of Jesus.

I don't think there's any suggestion in the text that they were unwilling to help. You know, there's this big problem. How do we feed all these people?

Nothing to suggest that the disciples were unwilling to help. They just didn't know how. Did they share the same depth of compassion as Jesus?

Well, we can be pretty confident in answering that no. They didn't share the same depth of compassion that Jesus had for the crowds, not even close. But I think as they listened to Jesus and as they saw Jesus, there was something of a growing understanding and yes, even compassion for these Gentiles that they wouldn't have been predisposed to have compassion for.

[20 : 24] But even recognizing that perhaps their compassion was very limited in comparison to the compassion of Jesus, even that I think is encouraging for us.

But even a little compassion is enough for starters to serve as partners with Jesus, even very little.

And if we're honest with ourselves, we say, well, I have so little compassion. Really, when we speak about those who live in this neighborhood, when we speak about this city, it's just, you know, where to start and, you know, not really that much compassion.

Well, that's okay. Let's start where we are. I'm sure the disciples didn't have huge reserves of compassion for these Gentiles. They probably wondered, what are we doing here anyway?

But they had enough to get going. They were listening to Jesus. They were available for Jesus. The whole account speaks of Jesus sharing with them the circumstances that they found themselves in.

[21 : 30] Jesus calls them, and in his description of the people's need, there is an implicit request for help. Jesus doesn't actually say, you know, what shall we do? He describes the situation.

You know, we call it a problem, but he describes the situation. There's all these people, they're hungry, they're about to go home, and there's a real danger that they might collapse on the way. That's the situation.

And he describes it to them. But I think implicit in that description, there is this challenge. What will we do? What should we do?

What could we do? What would you do to help these people? The disciples certainly understood it in that way. Their response makes it clear that they understood that Jesus was asking them to do something, and of course their problem is that they don't know what to do.

His disciples answered there in verse 33, where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd? They're already thinking, well, that's what we need to do. We need to get bread, but where could we do that?

[22 : 36] We want to help, we're available, but we simply don't know what to do. They were willing. Their willingness isn't in question, but they have no clue what could actually be done.

I sometimes think, or as I was thinking about this, is that not such a very good description of us often? Our willingness perhaps not as great as it might be, but there is a measure of willingness, but we simply haven't a clue.

You know, what could we do? How could we respond respond to the needs of so many people who aren't satisfied? Where do we begin?

What resources do we have to respond? Like the disciples. Yes, we're willing, but what can we do? What can we do? Let's get real.

There's nothing we can do. There are too many people. They were available to Jesus. There is here in the passage a curious. I describe it curious.

[23 : 38] I don't know if I would be so bold as to describe it as significant, but certainly a curious linguistic twist in the words that are used by Matthew for fish in verse 34 and verse 36.

So let me just explain what the curiosity is and draw out a possible significance. I leave it to you if you think that it is significant or not. In verse 34, when the disciples are explaining their limitations, there's this subsequent question of Jesus, how many loaves do you have?

And they replied, seven, and a few small fish. I don't think what we have here is simply an accurate description, though no doubt it is.

No doubt it was accurate that they had seven loaves and a few small fish. The language they've used, in fact, the word here translated small fish is simply fish in the diminutive.

And I think what you have here isn't just a description, it's the disciples really disparaging what they have. The idea is we've only got a few small fish.

[24 : 46] That's all we've got. Like, this is some kind of joke. You know, what possible use could these few small fish, they're not even big fish, they're not even medium-sized fish, they're just small fish.

That's all we've got. What could we possibly do with a few small fish? It's as if they're saying, really, to Jesus, look, Jesus, we really don't have anything.

Okay, you've asked the question, we'll tell you, this is what we've got, but we have nothing, nothing to give, nothing to satisfy the crowds. We have nothing, and we can do nothing.

But then it's curious that in verse 36, Matthew employs another word. It's really the same word, but no longer in its diminutive form, when he is describing Jesus performing the miracle.

In verse 36, we read, he told the crowd to sit down in the ground. Sorry, that's verse 35. And then we read on in verse 36, then he took the seven loaves and the fish. They're the same fish, but it's another word.

[25 : 47] They're not little anymore. They're just fish. Now, as I say, I don't know if that's hugely significant, but might there be something there? For the disciples, they're just a few small fish.

They're worth nothing. But for Jesus, they're fish that are useful. These fish will do. With these fish, I can work. And of course, we know what he did with them.

We can draw the application. I think it's very clear. Yes, we have so little to offer. What do I have? What gifts do I have? What resources do I have?

What ideas do I have? What do I have? We think of ourselves individually as believers. We could do so corporately as a congregation, however, in whatever direction you want to go in terms of applying it.

But we have so little. And yet, what we think is so little and so insignificant, and in the face of the need, just, it's like nothing. And Jesus says, no, I can work with that.

[26 : 47] You just give me what you've got, and we'll work with that. They were available to Jesus. And then finally, they were cooperating with Jesus.

Really from verse 36 through to the end of the passage, we have the description of the miracle. And here, when I'm speaking about the disciples cooperating with Jesus, I'm thinking about the actual distribution of the bread and the fish.

We commented on that, and we thought about the wee boy. Who was it who gave him the bread? Well, it was one of the disciples. And I'm thinking about that participation of the disciples.

Verse 36 is interesting, by the by, in the way that it really presents to us, in a few words, all the players, if you wish.

You have Jesus performing the miracle, but you have his prayer to the Father giving thanks. You have the disciples who are then involved in the distribution. And then, of course, you have the people who receive the bread product of this miracle.

[27 : 54] But our interest is with the disciples. What do they do? What do they actually do? How do they cooperate? How do they participate?

Well, verse 36 in the second half really describes it, and it's really, it's not very impressive. It says that he, that is Jesus, having, he took the fish, he took the bread, he broke them, and gave them to his disciples.

And there we have what they do. And they in turn to the people. That's it. And they in turn to the people. Well, and that expression, very simple expression, and they in turn to the people caught my attention.

The disciples really are being described as almost an extension of Jesus. The disciples increased the reach of Jesus. Jesus, in the limitations that he took upon himself, in his incarnate state, had limitations.

Jesus couldn't have distributed to all of these thousands of people. He simply couldn't have done that. He needed others to extend his reach.

[29 : 11] And even the way that it's put, and they in turn. It's so clear that the one who is doing the miracle, the one who is providing the resources, the one who is ultimately satisfying these hungry multitudes, is Jesus.

But he involves the disciples. They receive passively, as it were. They're there. They're available. They receive, and they in turn. They're a link, a small link, but a necessary link between Jesus and the hungry horse.

That necessary link that God has chosen, that there ought to be in his purposes, that we, that we, his disciples, should be that link between all the resources of the Godhead, all his power to satisfy.

And yet, for that to reach its destination, as it were, it is through these disciples, and they in turn to the people.

The disciples have nothing to give of their own. All they can do is pass on what Jesus has to give.

[30 : 31] What about us? What about you? Are you serving as a link between Jesus and the people round about you? Just a link. Nothing of your own to give.

Nothing of your own possession. But you, like the disciples, as you receive, in turn, can distribute and give.

Plenty of Jesus to give to a hungry world. Returning to what we commented on as a curious coincidence at the beginning, I wonder how many folks behind closed doors and the tenements and flats of Rose Mount, let's look beyond in Aberdeen, would echo the words of Mick Jagger to describe their lives.

I can't get no satisfaction. Is it my desire? Is it your desire? Is it our desire that it might be said of many of them in the days and weeks and years that lie ahead?

They all ate and were satisfied. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we come to you and we thank you that you are a God who uses the least and the worst of us.

[31 : 53] We thank you that you are a God who chooses to do that which you have purpose to do for the good of multitudes to work through and with your disciples.

We thank you that as we consider the disciples who followed you and who we have described for us in the Gospels, they were fallible men, flawed in so many ways, weak and dithering, in many ways inadequate and yet used by you, partnering with you to bring satisfaction to the hungry.

We pray that you would help us to see ourselves as those who are also so called to partner with you, that we would be an extension of you, that we would receive from you and distribute and give to others.

We pray that we would be those who are following you closely, that our faith would be fed as we see you in all of your beauty and in all of your power and all of your compassion, that we would be available for you even with what we might think to be resources so insignificant, that we would be ever ready to partner with you and cooperate with you and participate with you in your purposes for our day, for our generation, for our city, and for those who you place in our paths.

And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[33 : 39] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.