The setting is the N.E. shore of Lake Galilee, in north Israel.

Thousands of people are gathered about Jesus, having followed Him & His disciples there, knowing they could work miracles, & wanting to see them do so.

Jesus has now spent hours there, healing the sick among them, and then teaching them.

The crowd’s size may have kept some on its outskirts from hearing it all, w/ the interference of ambient outdoor noises, & w/ no means of amplifying the sound.

Mt 14:21 tells us there were 5000 men, but also that there were women/children present, in addition to the men.

The day was now spent, & it was beginning to get dark.

Most people hadn’t eaten since that morning, & some of them were getting so weak from hunger, they were likely to feint on their way home.

Some of the children present had prob. started crying, making it all the more difficult for those in the back of the crowd to hear Jesus (which prob. made them cranky too—if their own hunger hadn’t already done so).

In the midst of all this potential chaos, Jesus brought order to the scene, had His disciples organize the multitude into groups of 50 & 100, & miraculously fed the whole crowd.
It was an amazing display of divine power, but one which Jesus’ own disciples quickly forgot.

Mk 6 tells us, that just a few hours later, when they saw Jesus walking on water=> “they were utterly astonished, / for they had not gained any insight [into Jesus’ deity] from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened” (6:51f).

There were many insights for the disciples to gain from that incident but their hardened hearts were blind to them all.

It’s important that we not repeat the disciples’ faithless error, and fail to discern the meaning of God’s sovereign/providential activities in the world around us.

The episode we read about in John 6 is a watershed of such divine activity.

Instead of trying to deal w/ it all in 1 sermon, I’ll divide the passage into 2 parts, & only consider part 1 today.

Our text contains John’s account of Jesus’ feeding the 5000; after examining it, we will consider some of the many lessons we can/should learn from it…

So that will be the 2 parts of my sermon=>

* the story (a word I’m hesitant to use, because it might sound as if this were fictitious, & it’s not—it’s absolutely historical/true).

* lessons we learn & insights we gain from this text.
* The Feeding of the Five Thousand

John’s narrative of this event can be outlined as=>

The Discovery, The Direction, and The Distribution.

* The Discovery

[John 6:8-9]=> “One of His [Jesus’] disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to Him, / ‘There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?’”

Jesus already knew about this “lad” w/ the loaves/fish,

because He is omniscient God.

In verse 6 of this chapter, we read that He had known what He was intending to do here, all along, & He knew the role this lad was to play in His plan.

But Mk 6 says He had asked the disciples=> “How many loaves do you have? Go look!” (6:38).

He knew how many, but He wanted them to discover the answer for themselves.

Apparently, the disciples had milled through the multitude,

looking for anyone who might have bread to eat.

Andrew had discovered 1 boy in the crowd who had brought bread/fish, so he responded to X’s question by mentioning them.

But Andrew also made the obvious point that this boy’s meager provisions would in no way suffice to feed 5000 men.
Like Philip, he overlooked Jesus’ miracle-working power & thus His ability to provide food for everyone there. All the other Apostles had made the same mistake.

“Lad” translates a word that can refer to either a-boy/a-slave. Either way, this young man was prob. poor since the coarse bread made from barley grain was considered poor man’s food. It was a nourishing staple, but still today most people would prefer the taste/texture of bread made from wheat.

The 2 “fish” were either pickled/dried, & were prob. included to make the boy’s meal a little more palatable.

* The Direction

Mark 6 says that Jesus had felt compassion for this multitude “because they were like sheep without a shepherd.” They needed direction.

He took the role of their shepherd & began giving them direction.

[Verse 10]=> “Jesus said, ‘Have the people sit down.’ Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.”

X told His disciples to have the people sit down, the disciples told them to do so, & (surprisingly) they did it. They sat on the spring grass that covered this little plain, just onshore from Lake Galilee. Jesus had chosen a spot for this whole incident where the multitude would be able to eat in relative comfort.
The grass, having been trampled by thousands of people for several hours now, was prob. like a soft green mat/carpet.

Mark 6 (vss 39-40) even says they sat in groups of 50/100, which was going to make food distribution easier, & prevent anyone’s getting overlooked.

It’s surprising that all 5000 men, plus the women/children who were w/ them, willingly/voluntarily sat down on the grass. Nobody seems to have said, “I’m too important to do that because I’d get grass-stain on my clothes; I’ll wait for a chair.”

* Maybe they were simply awed by X, having just seen Him heal people, & having just heard His teaching.

* Maybe they each sat down, hoping they’d all get a better view of Him if everybody else cooperated, and followed their example.

* Maybe they were just so tired/weak, they wanted to sit.

* One thing is sure=> They didn’t sit down because they were expecting Jesus to feed them. Not even His own Apostles had foreseen that.

* The Distribution

[Verse 11]=> “Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted.”
Andrew apparently brought the boy’s food—or the boy with his food—to Jesus, who took/received it into His own hands.

Then our Lord gave thanks to the Father, for revealing it was His will, that Jesus perform this miracle.

He thanked/blessed God for authorizing Him to respond out of His compassion to the needs of all these people.

The Father was the Source of this miracle, it was all done according to His plan/purpose, and He intended it as a blessing for those who had come to hear His Son.

**Jesus distributed the food to the crowd through His disciples.**

If there were 7000 there (including women/children), each Apostle would have had to serve almost 600 people.

But the 12 may have recruited others among Jesus’ disciples to assist them in this task, doing the work of ushers, but in reverse.

I can imagine people who were 150 feet away in the crowd from where Jesus stood, watching Him, trying to figure out what He was doing, and wondering why the Apostles kept coming up to Him, holding out wicker baskets.

Then suddenly, an Apostle walks by, his basket obviously heavy & loaded with bread/fish, & those in the crowd who stand up to get a better view of what’s going on, hear someone behind them shout, “Down in front!”
What this person couldn’t see—but the Apostles saw very clearly—was that, as Jesus was distributing the bread/fish to His disciples, it was being multiplied in His hands. This was an on-going act of creation, as X called bread into existence that had never been baked, & was made of barley, never been grown in any farmer’s field. And Jesus created fish that had never swum in any lake, & would never be caught in any fisherman’s net. It was instant bread/fish, but true bread/fish.

**Earlier, Philip had done the mathematics that proved it was impossible to feed this many people.**

Now he watched Jesus calmly perform that impossibility, before his own eyes.

Andrew, who had brought the boy’s lunch to Jesus, watched as our Lord silently answered his question, “*What are these for so many people?*”

**John tells us, that when it was all said-done, everyone had as much to eat as he wanted.**

I wonder if there weren’t poor people in that crowd who’d never had as much as they wanted before this, because there’d never been enough food on their table to fully satisfy their hunger.

But this time, they (& everybody else) ate their fill, and their bellies were satisfied as never before.

It had been a lavish display of divine abundance/generosity.
* Lessons to Be Learned From This Narrative*

(lessons about our Lord, the boy/ his-bread/ the multitude, the disciples).

1) Lessons about Our Lord

The most important lesson/principle the Apostles & we are to take from the feeding of the 5000, is that Jesus X is Lord, the omnipotent God of heaven/earth. Therefore, He has all the power of God, w/i Himself, & that’s how He fed the 5000.

In the boy’s hands, that barley bread was just bread. But verse 11 said, “Jesus then **took the loaves.**”

Once placed in Jesus’ hands, that bread came into contact with omnipotent power of God.

In the boy’s hands, it was capable of feeding only him. In Jesus’ hands, it fed an entire multitude & it could have fed the whole world if He’d continued on.

Ownership of the bread/fish had been transferred to Jesus, & now it had infinite potential for eternal usefulness.

In the same way, when we as believers turn everything we are, & all we own, over to X, we too take on great power & potential for usefulness to God.

* Another lesson we learn from watching our Lord in this incident is the importance of doing everything we do for God’s glory.
Before Jesus distributed a single scrap of food to those thousands of people who were weak w/ hunger, He stopped to give His Heavenly Father thanks for it all. It’s an amazing thought that the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Person of the Godhead stopped/thanked the 1\textsuperscript{st} Person, for 5 pieces of flatbread, & 2 little pickled fish, because of what He would now do w/ them.

Whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we too should do it all to the glory of God (I Cor 10:31).

Jesus exemplifies that principle for us here.

* A 3\textsuperscript{rd} observation about our Lord which can be made from this text, is that He is a God of order.

We see it here in His having the multitude sit down, organized into groups of 50 & 100, an arrangement that prevented confusion/conflict, & created an openness that prevented all possibility/suspicion of trickery on His part.

We see that same order in His creation—stars circling w/i their galaxies, according to the unvarying mathematical laws of physics, established by God w/i His created order.

Sometimes our lives seem to be dominated by disorder and happenstance, but there is a divine Organizer at work, operating in an orderly way.
He is controlling every detail of our lives by His omnipotent grace.

As a result, in the midst of what appears to be meaningless coincidence, every one of God’s elect becomes saved & sanctified, & will ultimately be glorified—w/o exception.

There are no loose ends in God’s plan.

It’s all very orderly, because it’s all divinely purposeful.

In the process, the Spirit brings order/meaning to lives that were once full of disorder/chaos, before X took possession of them.

2) A Lesson about the Boy and His Bread

Neither one had much to offer our Lord: coarse poor-man’s bread and a boy whose only apparent claim to fame was his lunch.

But God loves to use ordinary things/people to accomplish extraordinary results.

The Talmud said barley bread was so coarse, it was fit only for horses/donkeys.

Andrew declared that even the quantity of the boy’s barley bread was inadequate for Jesus’ purpose.

“What are these for so many people?” he had asked.
One might ask, “If Jesus was going to go to the trouble of creating bread on this occasion, why didn’t He create something better-tasting than barley bread?”

Maybe pumpernickel bread or cinnamon-toast.

Because God thinks about bread differently—as a staple by which He can keep man alive, not as a heavenly culinary experience.

So we pray to Him=> “Give us this day our daily bread” (not our daily prime rib).

At the wedding feast of the Lamb, we will eat very well.

But meanwhile, this isn’t heaven, and we should come to grips w/ the truth that=> “man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD” (Deut 8:3).

That’s why God humbled Israel by feeding them w/ nothing but bread-like manna for 40 years.

Not that it’s wrong for us to enjoy a delicious steak dinner.

But that shouldn’t become a priority w/i a Xn’s life.

Giving the multitude a culinary delight was not important for Jesus—providing them w/ sufficient nutritious food so they wouldn’t feint on their way home, was.

Nor did this unknown boy have much to offer the Lord.

But by God’s providence, he was in the right place, on the right day, & was the right person w/ the one thing that was needed—food.
He might have been asking himself, “How could God ever use someone like me—so common/nondescript?”
That’s what Satan wants us to believe as well.

“You’re only a workman, or you’re only a mother or grandmother; God couldn’t use you.”
He’d have told David, “You’re just a shepherd boy w/ a slingshot. What could God do w/ you?”
Satan says those things because he fears what God actually can do through you, if you’ll make available to Him whatever assets you have, as this boy did w/ his food. Andrew didn’t confiscate it, taking it away from the boy by force—Jesus would never have allowed that.

The boy voluntarily gave it to him—or to Jesus.
That’s the only thing that really matters—our availability.
Bring whatever you have to the Lord, & give it to Him=&gt;
  * your mind (with its understanding of God’s Word),
  * your heart (warmed w/ love for your Lord),
  * your mouth (telling of X’s majesty and His goodness to you).
Even your little gifts can be profitable in the Savior’s hand.
Imagine the grin which must have spread across that boy’s face a little later.
The basket came around to him, & there was his lunch, multiplied hundreds of times over.
He thought he’d given it away, like casting his bread upon the water.
But here is was again.
I wonder if he told anyone around him what had actually happened.

3) A Lesson about the Multitude
This crowd was not made up of great men/women of faith.
It was simply a nondescript multitude, like most crowds.
But God’s grace is indiscriminate.
It’s available to anyone who will come to Jesus.
Later in this chapter, Jesus will tell this crowd, “You seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled” (6:26).
So there were many crass people in this multitude who would soon just look for another handout/free-lunch.
Why weren’t they at work? Prob. because many of them were simply loafers/hangers-on.
Some of the children in the crowd undoubtedly distracted others w/ their fidgeting/crying, making it difficult for people to hear X.
Truth be told, they were unwitting hindrances to Jesus’ ministry, far from adding anything beneficial by their presence there.
But that didn’t stop Jesus from feeding them all, out of His compassion for their plight.
He didn’t say to them, “I’ve examined every one of your hearts, & determined that only 300 are worthy of My help, so I’m sending all the rest of you home unfed.”

He didn’t say that, because that’s not how God operates.

He sends His rain/sunshine on both the unjust/just.

Jesus didn’t even exclude those who were of vile character, & in that size crowd, there prob. were some.

Nor did our Lord expect anything in return from those He fed.

That was good, since they had nothing to offer Him.

This was not a potluck, & He didn’t need their help.

The only thing the people in this multitude had to offer Jesus was hunger that could become the object of His compassion; And a willingness to listen to Him preach.

Beyond that, there was nothing about them that deserved Jesus’ consideration.

But fortunately for them, Jesus never waited for anybody to deserve His grace before He blessed them.

Does this not imply that Jesus, in His wonderful/loving patience/graciousness, is ready to minister-to/bless anyone who will come to Him?

Anyone w/ a spiritual appetite, who hungers/thirsts for righteousness, as Jesus said in Matt 5:6.

If I am a soul needing His love/mercy, doesn’t His feeding the 5000 imply He is willing meet my need too?
If I’m morally/spiritually unworthy, but I long for Jesus to cleanse/free me from my sin, don’t I have reason to expect that He will do that, since He came into this world to save sinners?
If He’s looking for sinners to save & cleanse & bless, here I am—save(cleanse/bless) me.
Not only does He invite me to come to Him, He commands me to do so, saying, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, & I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28).
The people in the multitude were weary & He met their need, so why shouldn’t He meet mine?
Even if I’m an out-of-place nuisance, like a sleeping/squalling baby at the back of the crowd, Jesus (the bread of life) will meet the spiritual needs of my soul.
The bounties of His grace are as much for me, as they are for anyone else.
4) A Lesson about the Disciples
* John tells us, “Having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated.”
But we know that it was X’s disciples who actually distributed the bread/fish to the crowd.
Mt 14:19 says=> “Looking up toward heaven, He blessed, and breaking the loaves He gave them to the disciples, & the disciples to the crowds.”

There is really no contradiction here.
John is making the point that, in using the disciples to distribute the food, Jesus was distributing it Himself. He worked through His disciples, & their efforts were His. This represents great condescension, as Jesus gave His disciples the privilege of ministering alongside Him, & on His behalf.
He didn’t need to do it that way.
He could have caused those lifeless fish to miraculously swim out through the grass to those for whom they were intended, then lay there dead, waiting to be eater.
He could also have miraculously filled each belly there directly with enough bread to satisfy it, not even bothering w/ the intermediate steps of bread creation/distribution.
But instead, He gave His disciples a role in His miracle, because this was also a way of teaching them.
And that, despite their failure to realize beforehand that He was even divinely empowered to feed this multitude.
By the same token, still today Jesus calls the people given Him by God, through the instrumentality of His disciples=> you/me.
It’s not because He really needs our help.
He didn’t need anyone’s help when He saved Paul.
In fact, His using us is often complicated by our own lack of faith, just as it was when He used the Apostles. And because of our unfaithfulness to take advantage of this opportunity to serve Him, He must sometimes use other, more faithful believers, in our place.

But still He continues to give us the opportunity to serve.

* Another truth we see here about our role as disciples, is that we don’t bake the bread of life—we just serve it. Jesus is the bread of life; we’re just waiters who distribute it.

It’s not our job to come up w/ new ideas to be preached/taught.

We are only responsible for grasping the soul-saving truth of the gospel, which Jesus has given us; and taking it to those who are hungry for the truth, w/o dropping it or contaminating it along the way, w/ our own human wisdom.

What a privilege our Lord has conferred on us, making us distributors of the Good News of His gospel message.

It would have been nice to help carry out the bread/fish w/ the Apostles, since the multitude was really hungry, night was falling, & they were feeling weak/needy.

The look of relief on those people’s faces, as they ate the bread/fish, & fed it to their children, must have become deeply imprinted in the Apostles’ memories.
But the joy of sharing the gospel w/ a soul being starved w/ guilt, & on its way to hell, unless X saves it, that’s even greater than what the Apostles must have felt that day.

We may sometimes hesitate to tell people about salvation through Jesus X, because we fear intruding in their lives.

But if they happen to be among those to whom the H.S. has given a sense of spiritual hunger they shouldn’t mind.

I doubt that anyone in that multitude on the N.E. shore of Galilee objected, that the Apostles were being intrusive, when they brought them bread/fish.

When we tell people that sin is the cause of their emptiness/unhappiness/hopelessness, we’re explaining to them something that is inherently true, but which they have never understood/admitted.

And then, when we tell them that Jesus is the bread of life, who can satisfy their souls and fill their lives with God’s own goodness, we reveal to them the blessed/eternal solution to their spiritual hunger.

Jesus has given us that bread, not only to feed/satisfy our own souls, but to distribute it to others, so they will no longer need to go hungry.

What a privilege it is for us to do that.

“Oh use me, Lord, use even me!
Just as You will, and when, and where.
Until Your blessed face I see.
Your rest, Your joy, Your glory share.”
John 6:8-11

1. In the midst of potential chaos, Jesus brought order to the scene, had His disciples organize the multitude into groups of 50 and 100, and miraculously [8 fed] the whole crowd.

2. Our text contains John’s account of Jesus’ feeding the 5000; after examining it, we will consider some of the many lessons we can and [14 should] learn from it…

* The Feeding of the Five Thousand

* The Discovery

[John 6:8-9]

3. “Lad” can refer to a boy or a slave; either way, this young man was probably poor since the coarse bread made from barley grain was considered [10 poor] man’s food.

* The Direction

[Verse 10]

4. All 5000 men plus the women and children who were with them willingly and voluntarily sat down on the [12 grass].

* The Distribution

[Verse 11]

5. Jesus distributed the food to the crowd through His [20 disciples].

6. As Jesus was distributing the bread and fish to His disciples, it was being [22 multiplied] in His hands.

* Lessons to Be Learned From This Narrative

Lessons about Our Lord

7. The most important principle we are to take from the feeding of the five thousand is that Jesus Christ is [10 Lord].
8. Another lesson we learn from watching our Lord in this incident is the importance of doing everything we do for God’s glory.  
I Cor 10:31

9. A third observation about our Lord from this text is that He is a God of order.

A Lesson about the Boy and His Bread  
Deut 8:3

10. Satan fears what God actually can do through you, if you will make available to Him whatever you have as this boy did with his food.

A Lesson about the Multitude  
Jn 6:26

11. The only thing the people in this multitude had to offer Jesus was hunger and a willingness to listen to Him; but fortunately for them Jesus never waited for anybody to deserve His grace.  
Mt 5:6; Mt 11:28

A Lesson about the Disciples  
Mt 14:19

12. Jesus gave His disciples the privilege of ministering alongside Him and on His behalf.

13. We don’t bake the bread of life, we just serve it; Jesus is the bread of life; we are just waiters who distribute it.

14. Jesus has given us that bread, not only to feed and satisfy our own souls, but to distribute it to others so they will no longer need to go hungry.