

Angela Pound

Notes

Around 20 minutes in Lennett's talk for Oct 1st. Are you a welcoming a church? It's not just about Sunday. We will come back to this the end of the month when Spencer will preach on The Church.

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I remember in third year university I had to take the dreaded real analysis math course. There's often one course in every degree that students dread, or know is a ton of work and real analysis was it for math. You see, anyone doing a major in math had to take real analysis. Real analysis would take the ideas that I learned in math earlier, and explore why they work. Instead of just learning how to calculate we'd learn how to prove things and think carefully about what makes math true. For instance one of the first assignments we did I remember having to prove that  $1 + 1 = 2$ . And you might think, it just is, but it would have to be done with mathematical language using proofs that might span a couple of pages.

There are some things in life that seem absolutely certain. If you add one apple to another apple, you get two apples. If you work a certain number of hours, you get a certain paycheck.

If you follow a recipe exactly, you should get the same result every time.

Life, it seems, runs on equations that make sense— $1 + 1 = 2$ . Simple. Predictable. Fair.

But what happens when it doesn't seem to work that way? Sometimes, when you combine two things, the result is *greater* than the sum of its parts.

If you've lived long enough, you know life doesn't always play by those rules.

Sometimes you put in a little effort, a small gesture, a quiet act of kindness, and somehow it multiplies into something bigger than you ever imagined.

Think about moments like that:

- A simple “thank you” that changes someone’s entire day.
- A few ingredients in the kitchen that somehow stretch to feed unexpected guests.
- A small donation that ends up meeting a much greater need.
- In those moments,  $1 + 1$  doesn't seem to equal 2. Something more happens. Something you can't measure with logic or math.

And that's where the story from John 6 meets us.

The miracle known as *Feeding the 5000* appears in all four gospels. The Gospel of John's telling—particularly its time and place—significantly shapes the gospel's message that Jesus is the Messiah. The details John includes, absent

from the other gospels, highlight his perspective of Jesus as not just another prophet but the Messiah and Son of God. Although readers of the Gospel of John know this, those He encounters during His ministry do not, including this crowd.

The Gospel of John was written for a Jewish-Christian community living as part of the Greco-Roman society and is written as an encouragement to understand Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God.

John 6 is part of the Festival Cycle starting in John 5. It follows Jewish festivals and growing opposition to Jesus. Jesus discusses Moses before performing the Feeding of the 5000, echoing God's provision of manna through Moses. This is the only miracle in all four gospels besides the resurrection, speaking to its significance. It occurs during the Passover time, when "hopes for deliverance ran even higher than usual, because the Jewish people rehearsed how God had delivered them from their oppressors by the hand of Moses." It sets up the "Bread of Life" discourse, where Jesus declares Himself to be "the bread of life" with belief in Him leading to eternal life.

This passage is used to illustrate Jesus, through a miracle similar to Moses in the wilderness, as the ultimate prophet to come, the Messiah and Son of God. John alone records this sign at the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias, named after the Roman Emperor Tiberius. In irony

known throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus, Israel's true king, appears near a city linked to earthly rulers. John includes an unnamed mountain, linking Moses and Jesus, as Jesus affirms Moses' authority in the John 5. The crowd is following Jesus from the demonstration of his signs for physical healing. The crowd, seeing the miraculous signs Jesus had performed, have followed him to the Sea of Tiberias, where Jesus performs yet another miracle. Wanting a king to relieve them of their hardships under the Roman Empire, they quickly flock to Jesus. But they are more interested in his physical ministry than in the spiritual truths he was teaching.

Jesus questions Philip as to where to buy bread, not only to determine the authenticity of Philip's faith but to continue the portrait of Jesus as a prophet and ultimately the Messiah, Son of God. Sometimes, we don't *see* the way for something to occur. Or we limit God only to what we have seen Him do in the past, not recognizing that this restricts what we believe God can do in the present or future. But God is boundless. Jesus essentially tells Philip not to put him in a box. A large crowd is following Jesus because they have seen the signs he has previously done to heal the sick, and presumably, so have the disciples, including Philip. Jesus asks Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" as a test, even though Jesus knows what he's going to do. Philip has seen miracles

Jesus has done but Philip doesn't seem to draw on this when Jesus asks this question, perhaps because the recent signs focused on healing? If Philip did, he might have stated something like, "I'm not sure, Jesus, but I've seen you do the miraculous. What would you have us do, or what are you going to do?" Instead, Philip relies on limited human understanding and ways, speaking to the fact that six months' wages would barely feed them a bite.

John's gospel is the only one to mention that the loaves are barley, reminiscent of when Elisha fed 100 with barley loaves, as it reports in 2 Kings 4:42–44 "A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, "Give it to the people and let them eat." But his servant said, "How can I set this before a hundred people?" So he repeated, "Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the Lord, 'They shall eat and have some left.' " He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the Lord." This mention of barley loaves is relating Jesus to Elisha, another prophet.

John emphasizes that Jesus distributes the food, highlighting His role as provider and linking it to spiritual nourishment. Just like the manna in the desert with Moses and the Israelites there not only was enough to eat, but like Elisha's feeding of 100, there were abundant leftovers, but

on a much greater scale. Since the crowd was fully satisfied, this moment reflects Psalm 23:1–2 “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters.” Jesus, the true Shepherd, provides abundantly.

The crowd identifies Jesus as the prophet, referencing a Moses-like prophet from Deuteronomy 18:15–19 “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. This is what you requested of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: “If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die.” Then the Lord replied to me: “They are right in what they have said. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable.”

Jesus’s revelation surpassed the crowd's understanding. The crowd saw a political Messiah for physical needs, while Jesus’ identity as Messiah was for spiritual needs: salvation and eternal life. Once realizing he was the prophet to come, they wanted to force him to be king to save them from their physical problems, seeing all that he had provided up to this point. “Jesus had a mission which intended to attract

attention and move people to action, but too much attention was dangerous.” Jesus, while tending to their physical needs, knew there was a bigger issue at stake for the crowd and the rest of humanity. The crowd didn’t realize all that Jesus was, including the Messiah, Son of God, and that he had come to save them from more than their immediate needs. Society today can still seek fulfillment in physical means (e.g., possessions, success, power) yet Jesus calls us to a deeper connection with Him, on His terms, which is not met through physical things. Jesus’ greater mission was humanity understanding his true identity as “Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” This still holds today and is to occur on God’s timing. “His kingship must follow another path.”

Jesus withdraws by himself once he realizes that the crowd wants to make him king by force. The crowd wanted to establish his earthly kingdom immediately, unaware that Jesus’ kingdom was a spiritual one. Jesus is to be “the Messiah on God’s terms...For them to ‘make’ Jesus king would mean that his power would rest on their acclaim; his authority would derive from the whims of the public.” They have chosen the right king but for the wrong reasons.

When God asked me to leave my full-time teaching career to go back to school full-time, my initial response was, “How am I going to feed my family?” As the breadwinner,

we wouldn't have enough money and resources to live on when I left my job. We tried to save up two years' wages so that I could go back to school, and while we saved, we didn't reach our goal before I gave my notice at work that I wasn't returning the following year. I had seen what God had done in my life previously, in particular, when I was 15. God miraculously provided for our family when my parents divorced and my mom became a single mom to two teenage girls at home, providing her, at the exact time needed, with a full-time nursing position at the local hospital. Yet, years after this experience, like Philip, I initially didn't see how God was going to provide. But God knew. God knew that less than two months after giving my notice to my career, He would call me into full-time pastoral ministry. I didn't anticipate any of it. Just as Jesus knew how he would provide through the boy with his fish and bread, Jesus saw how he was going to provide for my family. Like Philip that day, I initially relied on my own limited understanding instead of turning to God and relying on Him to provide.

So, what happens when  $1 + 1$  doesn't equal 2? This can happen with teamwork: one person might have great ideas, another strong organizational skills. Separately, they can each do good work—but together, they can create something far beyond what either could accomplish alone. In that case,  *$1 + 1$  could equal 3 (or more).*

When Ryan Hreljac was just six years old, he learned in school that many children in Africa didn't have clean water. He decided to do something small — earn \$70 by doing chores to build one well. His first well was built in Uganda in 1999.

That one small act of generosity has since grown into Ryan's Well Foundation, which has funded over 1,600 water projects, bringing clean water to more than 1 million people around the world. One child's \$70 became a wave of global transformation.  $1 + 1$  didn't equal 2 — it equaled life for thousands.

In 2013, Pastor Rick Bezet from New Life Church in Arkansas challenged his congregation to bring what they could for a Thanksgiving food drive. One small church of a few hundred people ended up collecting enough to feed over 10,000 families.

People brought cans, boxes, and meals — small offerings — but when combined, God multiplied them into something miraculous for their community.

In 2020, during the COVID-19 lockdowns, Rhiannon Menn, a mom from California, started baking an extra lasagna each week to deliver to a neighbour who was struggling. She shared her act of kindness on social media, and others wanted to join.

What started with one mom and one lasagna became “Lasagna Love”, a network of tens of thousands of

volunteers across the U.S. and Canada delivering free homemade meals to families in need. One meal turned into thousands of full stomachs and hopeful hearts. A little offering multiplied when shared.

Moments like these remind us that life isn't always a simple equation. Sometimes, when love and gratitude enter the picture, something shifts. The ordinary becomes extraordinary. And that's exactly what we see when Jesus takes five loaves and two fish — and turns scarcity into abundance. When something small is placed in the right hands — *God's hands* — it multiplies far beyond what anyone expects. When we bring what we have—no matter how small—and combine it with Jesus, something miraculous happens. In the story of the feeding of the 5,000, a boy offered his simple lunch of five loaves and two fish. On its own, it wasn't much—certainly not enough to feed a massive crowd. But when he offers it, Jesus steps into the equation. When placed in Jesus' hands, that small offering multiplied until everyone had more than enough. What was small becomes abundant. What seemed limited becomes overflowing.

Jesus' withdrawal from the crowd reminds us that God's ways often defy human logic and expectation. The people wanted immediate results—a king who would solve their earthly problems—but Jesus came to reveal a kingdom that begins in the heart, not on a throne. His mission

unfolded not through force or fame, but through humility, surrender, and divine purpose. This same truth challenges us today: to trust that God's plans and timing, though they may not align with our understanding, always lead to something greater. Just as Jesus revealed that true kingship and abundance come through obedience to the Father's will, we too are invited to see that in God's economy, what seems small or insignificant becomes more than enough when placed in His hands.

That's the miracle of God's economy—it doesn't add up the way ours does. When the ordinary meets the divine: the math changes. When gratitude meets generosity, when faith meets surrender, when our little meets Jesus' hands,  $1 + 1$  doesn't equal 2 anymore. What we have may seem small or insignificant, but with Jesus,  $1 + 1$  doesn't equal 2—it equals abundance.

This Thanksgiving, we're invited to see life that way—to recognize that God can take whatever we bring, no matter how small, and multiply it into something far greater than we could ever produce on our own. Because God doesn't use our math—He uses His own.

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