



SOPC Leaflet, Wednesday, October 29, 2025

A Message from Pastor Jim:

You Provide the Bread - Matthew 14:13-21

When I was growing up, church picnics were a big thing. I can still see it... long tables with white cloths strung out end to end. Plastic forks and knives, napkins and paper plates were on this end. Pitchers of lemonade and iced tea were on that end. In between, were assortments of meat dishes and vegetables down here; various salads and desserts down there. There were plenty of rolls and butter.

It makes me hungry just thinking about it. In some rural churches, the picnics were an all-day affair. People came to church early and left late. They ate and played and sang together -- true Christian fellowship. There always seemed to be plenty of food left over.

It looks like our story of the feeding of the 5,000 is no different--just another church picnic only a little bigger. No one announced ahead of time that on a certain hill at 4:00 in the afternoon "we will gather together with Jesus to eat." No one announced what to bring. Folks A-H bring vegetables. No one even organized it the way our church finally did. We had to. For a while everyone would bring the same thing. Everyone would bring dessert, and the children would be sick for two days. Or they would all bring salads and the dieticians would smile -- all that good roughage, great for regularity. No. At the feeding of the multitude, no one was expected. The whole thing was impromptu. It just happened. There they were listening to Jesus' sermon, enthralled with Jesus' words, and some stomachs started grumbling. So Jesus, deciding that he had talked long enough, began to be concerned about the people's hunger. He stopped and said, "Let's feed them." You see, our religion is not merely spiritual, but a physical matter as well. Our faith is not in a God who remains mysterious in some heaven we can't see. Our faith is in a God who became a man, who got hungry and thirsty even as we do today.

In Buttrick's words, "Not a marionette dropped from heaven or an angel came slumming." He was very man of every man who knew our hurts. When he cut his finger, it bled. He asked for water from the woman at the well, and on the cross he said "I thirst."

So, Jesus took compassion. He always has since it's his nature. It's the nature of God. "They don't need to go away. You give them something to eat."

In the wilderness, God provided manna for the Israelites who escaped from Egypt. God told pouting Elijah to get up and eat. In the upper room, he sat at a table, not too different from the one in every church, and said to each of us, his poor, dear children, broken and hungry, "take, eat."

All of these stories reveal a very simple fact -- that God Almighty is concerned about lunch. And because of that, Christ believed in feeding the hungry. He knew what real missionaries have always known -- that an empty stomach rarely leads to a soul redeemed for Christ, even before Maslow created his hierarchy of needs. Christ takes compassion on us in our human predicament. But the compassionate thing to do is not always the practical thing to do.

The practical thing to do in this case is to send the people away. So, the disciples did the only thing left for them to do: they met and reported to Jesus. "We have looked at the budget, taken a tally and concluded that there's not enough here to feed all these people. Even if we send out, the closest fried chicken place is 10 miles away. Not even Dominos can handle a crowd like this. Let's send them home." Good practical advice.

Well, Jesus didn't even put it to a vote. He seems to have made up his mind ahead of time. "Come now. You can do better than that. Work with what you've got." No matter how poor you think your resources are. No matter how deep the trouble, work with what you've got. "How many loaves have you? Work with what you've got."

You are in some deep trouble. There seems to be no way out. You are at the lowest point and Christ turns to you and asks, "How many loaves have you? Examine your resources." He says to the disciples, "Work with what you've got. By the way, what have you got anyway?" They replied, "five loaves and two fishes." It's not much by any standard. Not for 5,000 people. People of lesser faith in the power of God would have said, "Well, I see your point." But Jesus isn't put off by anyone. Christ is not interested in budgets. He is interested in people growing in the faith and trusting in his power. Budgets are only a barometer of how people are growing in the faith and trusting in his power.

I sometimes wonder if those who started the Stewpot at the church read this passage every morning. The hungry faces were about the poor peering in as they are in every town in every age. Some with good reason said, "We'll never be able to do it on \$300." Others heard the voice of God echoing through the ages. "You provide the bread. Let me take care of the miracle." And by God's grace, \$300 has grown to nearly \$500,000 and a few loaves have grown into hundreds of thousands of loaves as folks all over the city continue to provide the bread which God blesses and spreads to the poor and hungry of downtown Irmo. You send your money in and God multiplies it.

As a practical, reasonable Presbyterian, I have trouble with this idea. Even though I know it is right. As a practical, reasonable Presbyterian, I have trouble with Jesus. For me, a sinner, Jesus seems to believe too much in the power of God. I would rather hold back. Be realistic.

What if I am much more like the 42-year-old president of the successful computer software company whose sign on his desk reads, "Never promise them pie in the sky until you see the bakery truck coming down the street." But that sign is too safe for Jesus. He would knock it off the desk just as surely as he challenged his disciples that day. He is much more than entrepreneur, the risk taker. He is always out ahead of us, calling us forward challenging us to be more than we think we can by the grace of God. Or perhaps, he gives us such outlandish promises because he can in fact see the bakery truck with the pies way out in the distance.

Because he knows the power of almighty God when it is unleashed in the midst of a giving people, a congregation that means to take the lead, a congregation that means to show its community, yea, even this country, what it is to sacrifice in the name of Christ. "How many have you?" says the Lord. "Not many" is our reply.

"More than you think," says Jesus. "You don't have to send them away. Give them something to eat. You provide the bread, let me take care of the miracle. How many loaves have you? Work with what you've got."

Do you see the risk involved when you follow this Christ? We all want to be one-talent people holding on for dear life to the few chips we have, while all the time Jesus wants us to make like the five-talent man. He wants us to bet the whole ranch on Beautiful Dreamer to show in the third. "You provide the bread. Let me take care of the miracle." Perhaps William Barclay is right, an explanation that even a good post-Kantian, post-Newtonian, scientific secularist could buy. Perhaps he is right when he says that the focus of this story should not be on the loaves and the fishes, but on the hearts and souls of the people gathered. Perhaps the focus should not be on the miracle of the physical multiplication

of loaves, but the miracle of selfish people becoming generous people. Maybe what happened was that the 5,000 did have some food, and in the presence of Christ they opened up and began to share.

There was once a missionary in the Philippines who worked in the gold-mining communities of Bagio. He led many worship services in little huts that had been put up on stilts because of the monsoon rains. One Sunday he went up into a little hut only to find it packed with people. It was communion Sunday. In the front was a little table covered to the floor with white cloth. On it were a little piece of bread and a tiny Dixie cup filled with grape juice. He wondered whether these elements would be enough for this large group huddled together. But he forged ahead. He said the words over the bread and passed it around. Somehow, miraculously, a small corner of it came back. Then he took the little cup in his hand as he had held that silver chalice many times back in the states and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Drink ye all of it." He passed it around. It made it through the first two rows and came back. It was set on the table in front of him, empty.

They looked at him smiling as if to say, "Produce some more now." He looked about frantically for a bottle of grape juice. There was none in sight. He prayed, "Lord, help me" and suddenly a little brown arm came up from under the table and snatched the cup off. The missionary smiled at the people nervously and then pulled up the cloth only to see a little Filipino man with a pitcher of water and four packages of grape fizzies! Dropping the cloth quickly, the missionary looked back at the crowd smiling confidently. Pretty soon a little brown arm came up and placed a full cup of grape juice on top of the table. And off they went with the rest of the service. "You provide the bread; let me take care of the miracle."

What little thing can you do -- a word of hope? A helping hand? Though it may seem useless to you against the vast needs of the world, do it. Whatever the deed, God will bless it and spread it.

You and I are called to bring our tiny field to God's great sky, "our filament of wire to God's electric power. Thus, the scientist brings his labored search, and God gives the flash that leads to new discovery. Thus the (composer) brings his pen and seeming poverty of thought and -- suddenly the inspiration. Thus the saint brings (her) own humble life and the world is somehow changed." (George Buttrick, Interpreter's Bible, vol. 7, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1951, p. 432).

What preacher who has spent a lifetime preaching in a pulpit has not known the frustration of a sermon that seemed limp on Saturday night, but soared Sunday morning by the power of the Spirit? "You provide the bread. Let me take care of the miracle," says the Lord.

And so, it happened with a little man in North Carolina named Mr. Beam. He was a minister for a while in small country churches. Oh, how he loved to preach the Word, to stand before a little huddle of God's people and preach the Word from the Book. He considered it the greatest honor and privilege a person could ever have. But then he developed a problem with his throat. And that was the end of his preaching. It nearly broke his heart -- the man who loved preaching so much! When he died, he left all he had to a church in Charlotte for "purposes of evangelism" he said. What he left grew and grew and now, single-handedly supports the weekly television ministry. And it is said around Charlotte that in a single service on any given Sunday, more people hear the message of Christ than Mr. Beam ever preached to in a whole lifetime. "You provide the bread. Let God take care of the miracle." Worry not about what little you have to give.

This church is at a point in its history where dedication and grit will matter. The future is upon us now, and how we respond matters greatly. Will you provide the bread? Whatever it is, God will bless it and spread it to the glory of God's kingdom. Don't worry about the future anymore. You provide the bread. Let God take care of the miracle. Amen.

*****Extra Stewardship packets and pledge cards are available in the Narthex and in the church office. Please prayerfully consider how God is calling you to "provide the bread"--use your time, talents, treasures, service, and witness--in recognition and gratitude of them being given to you by God.**

We will dedicate these pledges to God's service via SOPC **NEXT SUNDAY, 11/9/25, Commitment Sunday.** If you have any questions, please contact a Stewardship Committee member. They are listed in the brochure included in the packet.***



October is Clergy Appreciation Month. If you feel so led, be sure to let Pastor Jim know what he means to this church and to you personally! Also, let's be sure that we let Rev. Bob Brearley know how thankful we are that he is sharing The Word with us during Pastor Jim's recuperation. For ideas about clergy appreciation from our Synod of South Atlantic, please visit: <https://www.synodofsouthatlantic.org/post/october-is-clergy-appreciation-month>.

- ❖ **This Sunday's Guest Preacher: Rev. Bob Brearley**
- ❖ **This Sunday's sermon: *The Blind Beggar***
- ❖ **This Sunday's Scripture: Luke 18:35-43**
- ❖ **This Sunday, we will have our All Saints' Remembrance in worship.** We hope that you will be able to attend as we give thanks for those who have gone before us in the faith and remember those who have joined the Church Triumphant in the past year.



November



- 2: Bill Salter
- 5: Beckett Tapler, Alex Will
- 11: Tommy Reiser
- 15: Kathie Cashion
- 17: Tish Lowe, Charlaine Pilkington
- 18: Robert Miller
- 19: Natalie Will
- 22: Julie Bussells, John Carter
- 29: Francis Ilonzeh



It's time to order poinsettias to adorn our sanctuary during the 2025 Advent & Christmas seasons!

The cost is \$14 per plant, payable to SOPC, due by Sunday, November 9th.

Please place this form with your payment in the offering boxes in the Narthex or return it to the church office. If you pay online, please select "Other," type in, "Poinsettia Order," and opt to cover the credit card processing charges. Thanks!

Your Name: _____

Your Email Address: _____

Your Phone Number: _____

Number of Poinsettias: _____ x \$14 = \$ _____ Total

In Honor / Memory of: _____



❖ **Church Family Updates:**

- **John Carter** is home from the hospital. Praise and thanks be to God!
- **From Shelagh Wirth:** “To my family @ SOPC: Thank you for the well wishes and prayers for my move to Canada. We are almost settled in. Trip up was without problems. We are exhausted but getting settled. Please continue to pray for my son as he returns to the US. My new address is: 5 Williams Wharf Rd, Long Reach, New Brunswick (NB), Canada, E5S 2M2.

❖ **The November Ladies’ Luncheon** will be held on Monday the 17th at California Dreaming on Main St. in Columbia at noon. If attending, please notify Margaret Royals via email: mroyals052@gmail.com or via text/phone: 803-608-1434. Thanks!

❖ **Our youth group** had a blast at Clinton Sease Farm’s Corn Maze last week! Pictures are below. **This week**, we will gather at SOPC at 5:30 pm on Sunday for food, fun, fellowship, games, and a continuation of our series of lessons on **STEWARDSHIP**. Bring a friend!



❖ **Our SOPC Book Group** is currently reading *The Woman They Could Not Silence* by Kate Moore and will meet to discuss it on 11/20/25 at Loveland Coffee in Irmo at 3 pm.



- ❖ **Advent Devotions:** If you cherish SOPC's annual Advent Devotionals like many do, would you prayerfully consider volunteering to head up the project this year? Pastor Jim will help out with ideas and Scripture passages, but we need someone to organize our writers and compile the booklet. Annah headed up the effort last year and just doesn't have the time to be the main person this year. Although, she is available for computer support and distribution support if needed! Contact the church office if you are willing to volunteer.



- ❖ We will collect our annual **Thornwell Offering** on Sunday, 11/23rd. For more information about Thornwell, visit: <https://thornwell.org/> or reach out to SOPC's Missions Ministry Chair, Tish Lowe.
- ❖ **From our Disciple Care Ministry:** Westminster PC is hosting a workshop on November 9th for those experiencing **grief, including strategies for navigating the Holidays**. Please see the flyer below. Pre-registration is appreciated, and the link to register is: <https://www.griefshare.org/events/276847>. If anyone has questions, have them contact Andrea Paschal at Westminster. Her contact information is on the flyer.



GriefShare

Surviving the *Holidays*

Encouragement, support, and valuable tools to navigate the challenges of the season.

Join us for this holiday seminar

Location	Date & time	Contact info
Westminster Presbyterian 1715 Broad River Rd Columbia, SC	Sunday, November 9 4:00 - 6:00 pm	Andrea Paschal andrea@westminsterpres.org (803) 772-1338

griefshare.org/holidays

- ❖ SOPC will host a meeting of Trinity Presbytery on Tuesday, November 18th. VOLUNTEERS are needed to greet, direct parking, serve lunch, etc. Contact Sharon Staton if you are available to help.
- ❖ Our next churchwide Fellowship Meal will be Sunday, November 16th! Stay tuned for more details!

- ❖ If you would like to volunteer in the sanctuary's sound booth occasionally, please contact the church office. Training provided!
- ❖ Parents of Young Children: Please grab a “Wiggle Bag” from the coat rack just inside the sanctuary entrance doors before worship starts and remember that the little ones go to the Children's Corner after the Children's Message during the service. Thanks!
- ❖ We're Collecting: These items may be placed in the large baskets in the narthex or brought to the church office.
 - Travel-size toiletries to hand out from our Clothing Closet weekly. Travel size are best for those experiencing homelessness or housing instability. We can always use small soaps, shampoos, lotions, conditioners, deodorants, toothpastes, and pocket packs of Kleenex. We have plenty of toothbrushes, disposable razors, combs, feminine hygiene products, and incontinence products for now. If you travel, please save the hotels' provided individual toiletries for us! Thanks!!
 - We collect used crayons in the church office for www.thecrayoninitiative.org. They sort them, melt them down, and make them into free, ergonomic crayons for pediatric hospital patients. We have collected 397 pounds so far!
 - Please save your cans' pop tops and bring them to the church office. So far, we have donated 4 gallon-sized Ziploc bags FULL of pop tops to the Ronald McDonald House in Columbia.
- ❖ Save the Date:
 - THIS SUNDAY, November 2: All Saints' Sunday
 - November 9: Commitment Sunday; Deadline to Order Poinsettias
 - November 16: Churchwide Fellowship Meal
 - November 18: SOPC will host the meeting of Trinity Presbytery.
 - November 23: Thornwell Offering
 - December 7: Christmas Music in Worship
- ❖ If you have information to go out to our church family in the weekly Leaflet newsletter, please get it to Annah in the church office by Tuesday of the week you want it to go out. Thanks!