

LOAVES AND FISHES

FROM THE WORSHIP SERVICE LED BY
THE 2016 CONFIRMATION CLASS OF
COMMUNITY CHURCH, CONGREGATIONAL

PART I – SIMONE OBERREITER

Today we have been talking about the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand men. This was a miracle, but I think it's a different type of miracle than what we are used to hearing about. I don't think the five loaves and two fish magically became enough to feed more than five thousand men.

During that time in history, when people went out for the day, they brought some food with them. They brought enough to feed themselves and their family, and probably even a bit more, just to be safe. In the Gospel of John, it is stated that Andrew (Simon Peter's brother) said, "*Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?*" (John 6:9 NIV) This one boy was willing to give up his food to share with the rest of the crowd. Everyone was too selfish to bring out the food they had brought, because they knew they would have to share it with everyone else.

Of course, this story would not be complete without a little bit of God's magic. As it says in Luke: "*Taking the five loaves and the two fish and, looking up to heaven, [Jesus] gave thanks and broke them.*" (Luke 9:16 NIV) I think the miracle in this story is God's ability to make people become the best of themselves. After the bread and fish were blessed, there was enough to fill twelve baskets of leftovers. This story kind of reminds me of a church potluck. Everyone brings a small dish or drinks, and usually at the end there are enough leftovers to feed a small army.

It took only one boy and a little bit of God's blessing to feed a huge crowd and more. There is no wonder why this story is in all four Gospels of the Bible. On the surface, this story seems to be just about God's power in making food grow in size. But between the lines, this story is about more than just food. This story is about sharing and giving.

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Sharing is one of the most important values in life. Sharing food, ideas, information, secrets; giving time, effort, and money. When you start to share, just like the boy, others will open up and share with you.

In relationships, building a bond is important. Sharing personal information and stories brings people closer together. One personal example of God's ability to bring out the best in people is the relationship between me and my sister. A few years ago, if you had asked me about my sister, I would probably have told you what grade she was in and how old she was. We rarely talked, and I could probably have told you only a few things about her personality.

When I joined Confirmation and became more invested in God, I noticed my relationship with my sister changing. We now talk every day, and it is no longer forced; it is now a real, genuine desire to become friends. God gave me the strength to SHARE with her. In turn, she shared with me and we created a bond. We became closer and closer.

After a little while, I noticed that all of my relationships strengthened when I grew close with God: family, friends, teachers, and more. I was willing to give myself to God, and in return I got more than I could ever ask for. Just like Jesus did that day on the beach. He gave the fish to God – put it in his hands – and the people were fed.

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PART II – NICHOLAS ROTTLER

A spiritual journey is defined as a process of reconciliation and education through enlightenment, and it is something that each person experiences individually through various experiences throughout their lives.

Personally, my path has been bumpy, with many unexpected turns that have taken me off the desired path. For the early years of my young life, I was brought up in a Christian environment at St. Margaret's Episcopal School, but that started to fade as I got older. The first notable change for me was when we moved to Idaho, because our lives were practically turned over. Instead of looking to God for guidance, my naïve ideologies pushed me away. So for the next few years, even after we returned to California and to St. Margaret's, I never took it seriously. I took it more as just a part of my life that was there for no apparent reasons.

But luckily I decided to attend Yosemite Sierra Summer Camp (YSSC) the summer going into sixth grade, which forever changed my views on religion. This Christian-based camp has influenced many of my friends, as well as my brother and me. The counselors there are well-versed in the Bible, and they offer great guidance on how to manage our spiritual connection with God around the schedule of our daily lives. That first year there reopened the doors in my mind on how important religion is in our daily lives, and it definitely got me thinking about changing my ways.

Although this was an important turning point, it never really directly affected my life until very recently – within the last year. Last summer I went back to YSSC, and this was when everything officially changed. My counselor gave me the right mind-set in order to pursue God. With God now a priority in my life, I decided to join the Confirmation Class with my brother Jack and my friend Wes. Joining the Confirmation was the best choice I ever made. I have met some incredible people who I care for a lot. This positive environment has allowed me to open up and to share my thoughts, some of which I did not even know I would ever share.

During my time with the Confirmation, my faith has definitely been strengthened, but I still have my doubts and troubles. One thing that has helped me with this has been to keep my trust in God and to not expect things that I pray for to happen immediately, or at all. Just let things play out as they are supposed to.

The Prayer 101 Retreat cleared this thought for me and further helped my faith. The main topic of the retreat was learning how to pray first of all, and also how to identify the voices that are speaking to you in each particular circumstance. This, in a way, polished the way I view praying and how I am supposed to do it. Furthermore, I feel like I became a lot more close to God over those great three days. By constantly praying and thinking about God, I was able to figure out multiple aspects of my life relating to sports, school, and social interactions. That has since made my life easier and more enjoyable.

As for now, my faith is still confused. But through my spiritual journey, I have definitely cleared things out and have begun to get on the path that most of us strive to be on. All I know for sure is that none of this would have been possible without Confirmation Class and all those here who have helped along the way. In conclusion, no one's spiritual journey is perfect, but it is important to trust our Lord to lead us on the right path and keep us running in the correct direction.

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PART III – JACK ROTTLER

Up until a few months ago, my faith journey had been pretty normal. My relationship with God was not a sure one, and I was missing the trust and consistency in order to have a strong relationship with him. When times were up, I would stray away from God because I thought I did not need him. And when times were down, I did not trust the Lord enough to commit the necessary time to him.

About a month ago, my Confirmation Class and other members of this church took a retreat down to Oceanside. Pastor Bruce there explained the importance of prayer and the effect that proper prayer can have on our lives.

More often than not, people pray talking over listening, asking for things they do not have in their lives, or praying for other people. Something Pastor Bruce said that was actually very true and hilarious was that if you actually realized how smart God was, you would not waste time talking about things he already knew. If you really measured his IQ against yours, you would definitely not be the one talking.

God has a lot to show you, and it is your job to listen to it. Building a strong relationship with God will not only improve your life, but your relationships with other people. He has a special path for you, and all you need to do is listen.

This new type of prayer that I learned has changed my life and faith. I have a lot more to learn, but listening to God through prayer has taught me a lot, and I am excited for the journey.

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PART IV – ALEX CHRISTIANO

As a young boy, church was just another normal aspect of my life – just as routine as brushing my teeth or waking up. But my level of understanding of God was not at the level that it should have been. In fact, it was so low, I would not even consider it a faith. I had almost no connection with the Spirit at a young age. Honestly, I cannot really blame myself, because I was young. I was not invested in what God’s message really was. I was more focused on what snacks we had after Sunday School. I’m sorry, but it’s the truth.

Even as I aged, my connection with God stayed at that stagnant state, and I really did not see myself invest more time to the church or to listen to God’s message. Church really was something that I just went for because of my parents. Bruce was talking about that recently in his sermon “In It For Myself,” and it really was true. I was listening to that sermon thinking “Wow, that was totally me a few years ago.” There was even a point in my life when I stopped attending church probably for a year, and it was because I was unmotivated, unattentive, and uninterested in what God had to say and what this church had to offer for me.

Yet there has been a turning point since then in my life. First of all, we recently were gifted with a new Pastor. Since then, I have been much more attentive on what the Scriptures have to say and what message God can give into my life. I have recently been sitting inside of the actual church and listening to the sermon, and I have been able to apply the lessons that Bruce and the Bible deliver and use those in my life outside of church. For me, that’s so amazing – that I can use church as a way for my own life to be increased and be a better Christian overall.

Whether it be that I go to church for myself or that I treat everybody as a child of God, I can apply any advice that is given from this podium and through the Bible into my own life. And because of this involvement with God, I believe I have turned into a better Christian and, overall, been a more ethically stable person. I have seen my relationships with my friends and my colleagues and teachers all increase.

Another impactful point in my life and in my faith journey was joining our Confirmation Class. I really think the most important thing about Confirmation for me was that everybody in the Class was my age and they all had similar experiences to mine. This made it feel okay – I could share what I had with my connection with God, and it was completely fine if I was not that developed with God. That's what other people were experiencing too.

As far as the Confirmation retreats go, those were also super-helpful for my connection with God, and they were also very fun. We really spent a lot of time talking about God, praying, discussing God's role in our lives. I had never taken a weekend out of my life to actually sit down and discuss what God means to me, what it means to other people, and how we can improve on our relationship. That was so impactful for me in increasing my relationship with God, and the retreats have meant so much to me.

Also, in recent times my faith has impacted others around me as well. First of all, I felt like sharing my recent interest in God and in our church and Confirmation with my close friend David. David had not been previously or heavily involved with any church system or any spiritual connection, but I told him that he should come to the Prayer 101 Retreat a few weekends ago. Being the close friends that we are, he happily obliged to go on the retreat with me.

I think the retreat was impactful to him, because after that meaningful and amazing retreat, David decided to join our Confirmation Class. This was only a few weeks ago, and we have been doing Confirmation for months now. I think David felt a connection with God over that weekend, and with praying in general. He decided to join Confirmation and attend church service when he can. David and I sat in the back one time and listened to the sermon, and I think that for me to be able to spread that message on to him is just so amazing, and it shows that my faith is strong enough that I can put it on to other people.

Also, over the retreat, I think that both David and I realized that we can use God in times we do not have anybody else. If we can increase our connection with God to the point that it is stable enough where we always have a support system, we always will be able to be motivated to get in touch with God and be in touch with his message.

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Overall, my involvement with God in recent times has made me more content as a person. And I will always have a support system I can turn to regardless of where I am. Even though I have a really long way to go as far as how close I am with God or how developed my relationship is, I think I will always have something to relate to, and I can use our church and our Confirmation Class and God as something that I always will have.

I suppose I could describe my faith just like the fish and bread in the Luke Scripture. Once I started sharing my own faith and I saw other people sharing their own faith, it made me a lot more comfortable to share with everybody – just like people shared with the fish and the bread. Once I realized that other people were at the same spot as me and that it was totally okay for me to be unclear on what God's message was or how I felt with God, it made me much more open to sharing my ideas and sharing what I knew with other people. Overall, I look forward to increasing my relationship with God and investing more time and more energy into this wonderful organization.

PRAYER

Jesus, we come to You in praise.

Jesus, Rabbi, Teacher – You came to Your people and sat among us, teaching and feeding and expressing Your care.

We are fed. Hallelujah!

Jesus, Fisher of Men – Will You come to the ordinary places of our lives and ask us to follow You?

We follow in faith. Praise be to God!

Precious Lord, You bring us forgiveness and love.

Son of God, Messiah of the World, we praise Your name. Your grace enfolds us, and it frees us to follow You.

In Your name we pray, *“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.”*

BENEDICTION

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May you feel His light shine on you and within you. May He lift up His smile on you and give you peace. Amen.