

Salem UMC: Sunday, May 25: Sermon Series:
The Church - Signpost of Hope
“Making It Happen” The United Methodist Women

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Mark 6:30-44 (NIV)

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹ Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

³² So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ³³ But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

³⁵ By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. “This is a remote place,” they said, “and it’s already very late. ³⁶ Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”

³⁷ But he answered, “You give them something to eat.”

They said to him, “That would take more than half a year’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?”

³⁸ “How many loaves do you have?” he asked. “Go and see.”

When they found out, they said, “Five—and two fish.”

³⁹ Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. ⁴¹ Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² They all ate and were

satisfied,⁴³ and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish.⁴⁴ The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

Moment of Silence

Understanding the passage

Context: Mark's telling of the story seems breathless. Chapter 6 starts with Jesus being rejected by his hometown. In rejecting Jesus, the people of Nazareth reject the power of God that is at work in Jesus. Then Jesus sends his disciples out two by two to proclaim and live the life Jesus lives in their presence. Jesus commands his disciples to proclaim, heal, and overcome evil. He gives them authority as they go in the name, spirit, and power of God. Next comes the story of the death of John the Baptist. Jesus learns of the death of the man who had baptized him from his disciples. Surely they were grieving the loss, and recognizing that doing the will of God was difficult and dangerous. After all these challenges, Jesus invites the disciples to come away to a quiet place for rest. They get in the boat and set off for a secluded place.

What happens next is a story of God's extravagant grace. People from all the towns arrive ahead of Jesus and his disciples. When the boat lands, Jesus has compassion for the crowd. He feeds them spiritually, with his teaching and preaching. The disciples get concerned when the hour grows late. They know the crowd must be getting physically hungry. They know they are in an isolated area. The disciples ask Jesus to send the crowd away. It seemed like a reasonable thing to do.

Jesus astonishes the disciples when Jesus tells them to give the people gathered there something to eat. The disciples find this task overwhelming. They object that there is no way they can do what Jesus is asking of them.

Instead of sending the crowd away, Jesus gives the disciples something they can do, "Go and see how many loaves are available." The disciples find out what is available. Equipped with five loaves and two fish, Jesus directs the crowd to sit down in groups. Because they are open to Jesus, unlike the people of Nazareth, they form themselves into small communities. Jesus gives thanks to God, blessing the bread and fish. Jesus breaks the bread and divides the fish. Then Jesus gives the food to the disciples to distribute. The disciples accept this call to serve. The crowd responds to Jesus' invitation,

sharing what they have with one another. At the end of this meal, there was an abundance of food left over – far more than what they started with.

What was the miracle in his passage? Was it the heart of compassion even when Jesus was hurting from the loss of John, whose death foreshadows his own? Was it that the disciples, who did not believe they had the power to care for the needs of all those people, were a part of God's extravagant grace? Was it that the people, when given the opportunity to share with one another, overcame their assumption of scarcity and their self-centeredness, and were willing to be part of a community, freely sharing what they had with one another?

Relevance: So how is this story relevant today? One example of living out the heart of Jesus, which leads to acts of compassion, can be seen in the purpose of the United Methodist Women. The organized unit of United Methodist Women shall be *a community of women whose purpose is to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ; to develop a creative, supportive fellowship; and to expand concepts of mission through participation in the global ministries of the church.*

Who is a member of this community? Any woman who believes in the purpose is a United Methodist Woman. There is no other requirement. This is not a dues-paying social club. You do not have to be a member of the United Methodist Church. To be a member, you have to desire to know God and to seek to live the life Jesus lived. This is a life-long endeavor, one that is shared by and with other women in a community.

What does this community do? United Methodist Women work together to develop a creative, supportive fellowship. Just as the disciples who followed Jesus came from different walks of life and held different political views, so are the United Methodist Women a diverse group. What they hold in common is their commitment to know God through Jesus Christ, and that translates into supporting one another. This is done through meetings for spiritual growth, leadership development, and education about concepts of mission. United Methodist Women follow the same pattern that we see Jesus using with the disciples. United Methodist Women are in fellowship with the same heart of compassion.

When and **where** do United Methodist Women gather? They gather in local units face-to-face or virtually. They gather in Districts at prayer luncheons

for environmental justice, at workshops on how the church can be welcoming to persons with disabilities, at annual celebrations to acknowledge the work they do to put faith, hope and love into action. They gather as a Conference for Mission u spiritual growth and mission education, and for annual celebrations to do hands-on mission. United Methodist Women support prison ministry with contributions to KAIROS spiritual retreats for those incarcerated, and enabling newly released women to dress for job interviews. They help the homeless by supporting their education through programs and scholarships. They feed the hungry by filling backpacks with food for children in poverty to take home over the weekend. They enable parents to provide for their children by filling backpacks with school supplies, providing goods for food pantries, and gifts for Christmas. They gather nationally and internationally at Quadrennial Assemblies, filling convention centers with worship and workshops, marching for a life of abundance for all, in solidarity with restaurant workers organizing for dignity and justice, and bringing donations of prayer shawls

How do United Methodist Women participate in the global ministries of the Church? United Methodist women are advocates for stopping domestic violence, economic justice, environmental justice, global justice and peace, health care, stopping human trafficking, immigration justice, racial justice, and women's rights. They take part in the Ubuntu day of service, spending the day cleaning up the grounds of a community center so 100 immigrants can have a nice setting for their ceremony to become naturalized citizens, with 300 members of the community attending the ceremony. They give voice to the individual, allowing each woman to find her own voice. They connect for action with one another and with partners in mission to further the purpose. They practice radical welcome, inviting new and unnoticed women to participate, join, and shape our work to turn faith, hope, and love into action. United Methodist Women Make It Happen!

Why: I would like to close with a prayer written by Stephanie Grener, a UMW Coordinator for social action:

God of grace, we are joyful for the blessing of sisterhood. How wonderful it is to have the love, encouragement grace and strength through these bonds! We are thankful for the opportunities to come together and renew one another. We praise you for the connections we have made and will continue to make as we go out into the world. Lord, call us to extend our love beyond the walls of comfort. Encourage us to make connections with women who

are on the outside, who lack this connection with other women. Lord, show us the way to use our talents to bring these women into your fold. Keep our hearts and minds focused on Your will as we continue to advocate, serve and learn about women who live with pain and suffering. Many are hurting, not just physically but spiritually and emotionally. Please provide us opportunities to share your love and grace with these women. Let us remember Your example, to those who were not accepted by society, when we are called to serve and to stand firm in our faith to be Your light in the world.