

**Equipped to Do the Work of God**  
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John 6:1-12

Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish.

I know this may surprise some of you, but I am not exactly Bob the Builder. I won't be getting my own show on HGTV with Marissa about home design and renovation. I've never had a desire to put up drywall, install insulation for pipes, or build kitchen cabinets. I never had an interest in learning these skills from Bob the Builder or anyone else who sings, "Can we fix it? Yes, we can!" So, in 2019 when I began my seminary internship at Grace Church in Manhattan and was told that part of my work would be with their outreach commission helping build a home in Queens with Habitat for Humanity, I was a little nervous. How could I possibly help? I couldn't say no. I was the new guy. They were counting on me to be there, and our work would help create an affordable home for a family that needed it. I also believe that Habitat for Humanity is one of the many ways we can do God's work here on earth.

The first Habitat build was memorable. I volunteered with my then fiancée and now wife, Marissa because I knew that I would need someone to commiserate with when I stood clueless as to what to do next. We made our way to Queens and there stood the house. Numerous other groups had already been working on it, and the progress was remarkable. It had siding, windows, and doors all assembled. Inside, the installation of drywall had already begun. Our task for the day would be completing the drywall on the front side of the house. As we began receiving instruction, our Habitat leader for the day, Butch, told us something that stuck with me. He said something like, "There have been groups before you and there will be groups after you. It's not about rushing through the project, but rather it's about taking the time to learn and work together as a group. We really have to be united in our work today to get the house built for the family."

When he said that I finally relaxed. As a new member to the Grace Church family at the time, it wasn't my job to do this Habitat build by myself. I was accompanied by fellow Christians who knew that we were just a piece of this puzzle. Some of us were experienced in installing drywall and some of us weren't, but together we could get it done. As Bob the Builder would say, "Can we fix it? Yes, we can." Together we could do God's work. A task that seemed daunting to an inexperienced person like myself was now made a little easier because of those I had around me. I got to know some of the wonderful people of Grace Church through something that I was apprehensive about because I was worried about my inabilities. However, God's work is not meant to be done alone.

Today, we heard the story of the only miracle included in all four Gospels. The four Gospels record different versions of the feeding of the five thousand, so clearly Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John want us to pay attention. Did Jesus perform this miracle on his own? No. When supplies were low, Jesus called on the help of his disciples and those around him to feed all of

those people. It suggests to us that God prefers to do his work here on Earth in partnership with us. We may feel ill-equipped to do the work of God, but with Jesus, we can do great things. Jesus didn't do everything by himself. He could have, but he knew the only way to reach many was to do the work together.

In today's version of the miracle that we heard in John, there is a lot of activity. We are invited into a story that is large. Jesus was well into his earthly ministry, at this point in John he had performed his first miracle, he had healed some folks, and now was retreating to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. The crowds did not allow for a smooth getaway, and they followed Jesus and his disciples. These followers were not worried about whether or not they would be hungry, but rather they wanted to feed a spiritual hunger in following Jesus. When dinner time arrived, Jesus asked Philip where they were going to find enough bread to feed everyone, to see how Philip would respond. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." I don't know about you but I sense a little doubt in Philip's response.

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, pointed out that the only food near Jesus and his disciples was that of a boy who had five barley loaves and two fish. Then Jesus ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. In John's gospel, Jesus simply took the loaves and the fishes, gave thanks, and distributed it among the five thousand in attendance. There was so much food left over that Jesus called his disciples to help collect the surplus that was left so that nothing was lost. Could Jesus have done all of this on his own and skipped a few steps? Of course, he could have. Did he need the boy and his food? Did he need the disciples?

No, but Jesus knew that once he died it would be up to his followers to expand the kingdom. Jesus entrusted his disciples with the feeding of those people who chose to follow him. I believe that now more than ever Jesus is trusting us to take care of each other and help do his work. Our country is very divided, our world is in pain, and our people are suffering. Yet, I believe that among all of that, Jesus is calling upon us.

Whether it is collecting school supplies for our outreach partners, going on mission trips both locally and internationally, building a home with Habitat for Humanity with little building experience, or if it is feeding five thousand people with five loaves and two fish God is using us. God calls us with the skills and experiences that we have to do extraordinary things.

Some of you may be thinking, what makes me worthy or even capable of doing God's work? It is daunting to think that God has empowered us to work in his name. God's job is not an easy one and sometimes requires miracles like the one in today's Gospel to take place. When Jesus asked his disciple, Philip, what they were going to feed the people his answer didn't exude confidence. We as mere mortals don't have enough to bring to the table. It is an impossible task to feed 5,000 people with five loaves of bread. Our city of Philadelphia is labeled "America's poorest big city." More than 20% of Philadelphians are living in poverty and about one in ten Philadelphians are living in deep poverty.<sup>1</sup> So our sense of inadequacy is well-founded. Our skills and experiences often feel inadequate when faced with the task of doing God's work.

When I arrived at the Habitat site in Queens, I thought to myself, "I hope somebody tells me what to do." I didn't want to mess anything up because I knew that this house was going to be inhabited by a family that needed it. I don't think I'm alone in feeling this way when embarking on God's work. When we care about something like the kingdom of God that is so

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<sup>1</sup> <https://whyy.org/articles/philadelphia-americas-poorest-big-city-poverty/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CMost%20recently%2C%20as%20of%202022,Philadelphians%20living%20in%20deep%20poverty.%E2%80%9D>

grandiose, we can feel small in comparison. The good news is that God doesn't want us to work alone.

Jesus wanted the disciples to dream bigger. The disciples told Jesus that they had nothing to offer the crowds, but in reality, they had something. Jesus wanted them to see that the little they had could become more than they could dream of if they offered it to him first. We can offer our dreams to Jesus as well, and trust in his power to bless and multiply them. The late American politician and civil rights leader John Lewis was someone who dreamed bigger. He was able to accomplish great things because he was committed to a life in Christ. Lewis would offer up to Jesus the little he had - which is all any of us have - and Jesus multiplied his works beyond imagining. Lewis was inspired by the preaching and teaching of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and began his lifelong fight for racial equality at an early age.

As a child, Lewis would preach to the chickens on his farm in Alabama because he wanted to be a preacher. During Lewis' college years, he participated in lunch counter sit-ins, he also joined the Freedom Riders, and at the age of 23 was a keynote speaker at the historic 1963 March on Washington. A news article stated that Lewis, "was widely seen as a moral conscience of Congress because of his decades-long embodiment of nonviolent fight for civil rights." Lewis understood what it meant to dream big as a Christian. He used the skills that God gave him to do what he felt called to. Lewis' brother said, "Lewis really believed in God and his political career was an extension of his faith." Lewis believed that there was a force behind him and in front of him when he and many others marched from Selma to Montgomery.

A lot of the time Lewis did not know what kind of evil he would encounter as he participated in nonviolent protests, but he knew that God was alongside him and the many others that joined him. Lewis offered up his life to God and in return, God was able to help him influence the lives of many. We may not accomplish the things that John Lewis or the disciples of Christ did, but God believes in us. We are the body of Christ working in the world today and we can do great things through him who strengthens us.

During that Habitat build, I was worried about making a mistake. Once Butch gave me those encouraging words that reminded me that it's not about perfection but rather it's about service to others. I felt this force behind me. A force that I could only liken to the Holy Spirit as it infused itself throughout our worksite. Our group was able to complete our tasks because we offered up what little skills we had to God and our efforts were fruitful.

God has entrusted us to be the body of Christ. God does not work alone, but instead through people like you and me. We can express our faith through acts of love such as the building of a Habitat for Humanity home, and not letting hate and fear divide us, God has asked us to offer the little we have to Jesus as we live out our faith and expand the kingdom of God with the skills and abilities with which God has blessed us.

In just a little bit we will be celebrating Holy Eucharist. We will be offering up to God the little bit of bread and wine we have and Jesus takes it and turns it into the food for eternal life. We come to God in our absolute poverty and inability to bring ourselves out of error into truth, out of sin into righteousness, out of death into life. We need Jesus, through him we are made whole.

Amen.