

Good News: Organizing Compassionate Community Care

Third Sunday in Lent

Mark 6:32-44 Ephesians 3:20-21
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Rev. Todd B. Freeman
March 8, 2026

When we hear the story of the feeding of the five thousand, we often imagine a miracle of multiplication—bread appearing out of nowhere, fish stretching beyond reason. And yes, there is mystery here. But there is also something deeply practical happening in this story. There is organizing.

Jesus and the disciples set out for a deserted place. They are tired. They are seeking rest. But the crowds arrive before they do. The need is immediate and visible. And instead of sending the people away, **Jesus has compassion. Compassion is not just a feeling in this story. It becomes a plan.** The disciples see a logistical nightmare: thousands of people in a remote place with no food infrastructure. Their solution is efficient and individualized: “Send them away so they can buy something for themselves.” That’s how our world is wired. If you need food, go purchase it. If you can’t afford it, that’s your problem. If the system fails you, navigate it alone. But Jesus refuses to privatize the problem. **“You give them something to eat.”**

With that one sentence, Jesus shifts responsibility from the marketplace to the community. He refuses to treat hunger as an individual issue. He names it as a shared one. The disciples are overwhelmed. They do the math. They count the cost. They calculate scarcity. But Jesus asks a different question: “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” **Before strategy, before scale, before budget—inventory. This is community organizing 101. Organizing always begins there. Not with what we lack, but with what we have.** Who is here? What skills are present? What resources are already in our midst? Five loaves. Two fish. In isolation, it is nothing. In community, it becomes enough. And then something remarkable happens.

Jesus tells the disciples to have the people sit down in groups on the green grass—groups of hundreds and fifties. This is not chaos. This is structure. Jesus does not attempt to feed five thousand individuals one by one. **He forms networks. Smaller communities within the larger crowd.** Circles where faces can be seen. Where needs can be named. Where food can be passed hand to hand. **The miracle flows through organization.**

Notice: the bread does not simply fall from heaven into each person’s lap. It moves through the hands of the disciples. It moves through the formation of groups. It moves through shared participation. **Jesus models a way of being in community that resists both savior-complex heroics and rugged individualism. He does not feed everyone alone. And he does not tell them to fend for themselves. He organizes them.**

This matters for us. Because when we look at the needs in our neighborhoods—food insecurity, housing instability, healthcare gaps, isolation among the elderly, overworked parents—we can feel like the disciples. The task is too big. The resources are too small. The problems are systemic. And they are. But **Jesus does not wait for perfect conditions or comprehensive policy reform before acting. He starts where he is, with who is there, and what they have. Community organizing is holy work. It begins with compassion—the refusal to look away. It continues with inventory—“Go and see.” And it matures through structure—groups of fifty and a hundred.**

Too often, churches assume that goodwill alone is enough. If we just care deeply, things will change. But Jesus shows us that **compassion needs coordination.** Love needs systems. Generosity needs pathways. **He creates an environment where sharing can happen.** Some scholars suggest that the miracle may have unfolded as people, inspired by Jesus' blessing, began sharing what they had brought with them and hidden away. Whether bread multiplied supernaturally or generosity multiplied socially, the outcome is the same: everyone is fed because something shifted from scarcity to shared abundance. That shift does not happen by accident. It happens because someone said, “Sit down together.” It happens because someone took responsibility for forming groups. It happens because the disciples moved from panic to participation.

And here is the good news for us: movements are built this way. Not through lone heroes, but through networks of care. Like networks of churches working together. Not through centralized control, but through empowered communities. Not through abstract ideals, but through people sitting on actual grass, passing actual bread. The early church understood this. They organized around tables. They pooled resources. They made sure no one among them was in need. They structured their life together so that compassion could move efficiently and effectively.

In our time, we need that same imagination. What would it look like for us to resist the cultural script of “everyone for themselves” and instead hear Jesus' command as addressed to us? “You give them something to eat.” What if that means building mutual aid networks? What if that means partnering with local organizations rather than duplicating efforts? What if that means mapping the gifts in this congregation—who gardens, who cooks, who has legal expertise, who can tutor, who has space, who has time? What if our miracle begins not with asking what we can afford, but with asking how we can organize? Because here's the truth: **most communities already have more than they realize.**

The challenge is not always supply; it is coordination. It is connection. It is trust. Jesus builds trust by gathering people into smaller circles. He builds dignity by letting the disciples distribute the food. He builds sustainability by ensuring leftovers are gathered—nothing wasted. Even the leftovers tell a story. Twelve baskets. Enough to remind the disciples that participation in God's work does not deplete them; it deepens them. **When we organize for collective care, we are not emptied—we are expanded.** The disciples began the day seeing only limits. They ended it carrying baskets of abundance.

That transformation—from scarcity thinking to community imagination—is itself a miracle. And so, when we – as individuals and as a community of faith – feel small in the face of large needs, when we are tempted to send people away because the problem feels too heavy, let us remember this story.

Compassion is our starting point.
Inventory is our next step.
Organization is our strategy.
Participation is our calling.

We do not have to feed five thousand alone. But together—grouped, connected, mobilized—we may discover that what we have is enough. The good news is not only that Jesus feeds the crowd. The good news is that he shows us how. And in a world built on isolation and competition, that may be the most radical miracle of all. Amen.

Resources:
A Sanctified Art, Lent 2026
Chatgpt