

**FIRSTNORTH CHRISTIAN CHURCH
REV. JOHN BURTON
NOVEMBER 20, 2011**

SERMON: "THANKFUL FOR MULTIPLICATION"

TEXT: MARK 6:30-44

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat. But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?" And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." When they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

I don't know about you but I am with the 5,000 - I am most grateful when my plate is full, even if there is a smidge of gravy on my tie and my belt has somehow shrunk a whole notch. Considering the alternative, I am grateful when I am full! How about you?

This Thanksgiving it is important for us to consider the things we ought to be grateful for and then say a word of thanks to God for them! Is that so much to ask?!

I'm thankful for:

- × Good cooks
- × Wind chimes in the twilight
- × Our youth, the Youth Ministry Council, and Cassie
- × The day gas gets back under \$3 per gallon

I'm thankful for:

- × Chocolate, the more the better
- × The people who opened their hearts & closets & wallets for victims of disasters
- × Faithful stewards
- × Devoted church volunteers

I'm thankful for:

- × A great choir and music ministry team
- × A loving family to come home to
- × A spouse's smiling face
- × Hot, running water
 - My Dad told that in his first year at A&M he lived in a condemned dormitory but it had running water – the freshmen were required to run it for the upper classmen!

I'm thankful for:

- × National Parks
- × All our Sunday school teachers
- × Still having hair on top of my head, for maybe a few more years
- × A beautiful sanctuary – with a white roof!

I challenge you to make a personal list of things you are grateful for – I bet it will be even more varied and interesting than mine! And when you have it – schedule some time to share it with God! I'm sure that God will be all ears!

You know, there is a Yiddish saying about giving thanks, "If we thanked God for all the good things in our lives there wouldn't be time to weep over the bad!" Amen.

A much more American saying about giving thanks is: "I heard about a woman who only had two teeth left (one top and one bottom) and she came to church to thank God that her teeth "hit."

If you look hard enough you can find things for which to be thankful and if you concentrate on them then maybe the bad things won't seem so bad.

God has blessed us with so many gifts that it's hard to take them all in, especially the non-physical one. So, let me see if you join me in being thankful for all the people who have taught us:

For the Seniors, who have taught us:

- How to grow old but stay young at heart
- And how to live with dignity and grace in difficult times
- How to handle loss
- And how to let Jesus guide us out of despair

And for our young people, who have taught us:

- How to laugh from our toes all the way up
- How to dream big dreams
- How to see Jesus afresh
- And how to play.

For our former teachers, who have taught us:

- Algebra, English, and History
- Courtesy, dedication, and pride
- Biology, Trigonometry, and Geography
- Along with hope, faith, and compassion.

For generations of our Elders, who have taught us:

- That our congregation revolves around Jesus
- That it is bound together with love
- That our congregation is for others
- And that love, grace, and mercy begin at home

Yes, we have a lot to be thankful for! Someone once said that you never know how much you have to be thankful for until you have to pay taxes on it! I hope that is not true – I hope that you can count your blessings this week and lift up a sincere word of thanks to your Lord and Savior!

The most important thing that we have to be grateful for is that Jesus came down from Heaven to die on the cross that we might not perish but have eternal life.

Hey, that's a hard one to think about in the 90 seconds between plays of a Cowboy's Thanksgiving Game. That one you have to think about, meditate on it, roll it around

for a while before you can appreciate the enormity of it. It demands a time of its own – not moments stolen from a hectic day.

Someone died for us – for you – for me – for our families!! How sad that it was necessary – how wonderful that Jesus was willing to do it – how sad that we are unworthy of it – how wonderful that we don't have to be worthy of it, only grateful!

I've thought about it – I think I'd be willing to die to save one of my family members. I hope it will never come to that but I think maybe I could make that sacrifice if I had to – but to die for strangers, for people who I never met, or people who don't associate with me, or people who revile me – I'm not real sure I could do that. It would be a challenge! But Jesus did. He did not die just for the righteous folk, or the Jewish folk, or the folk who yelled "Halleljuah" anytime he came to town. He died for the Pharisees and the Scribes, the people who spit at him and plotted against him, the lepers and the tax collectors, and the people who never heard of him. He gave his life for them – that we might not perish but have eternal life.

Sometime, before or after the Thanksgiving bird is consumed and people loosen their belts and take a thanksgiving nap, shouldn't we take some time to be grateful for what Jesus did for us – after all, we never got to thank the man personally!

But wait, wait, wait, I had a scripture when I came to the pulpit – it would be a shame to ignore it! Remember, that one about Jesus feeding the multitude.

Can you imagine our Lord looking down at that pitiful basket of five loaves and two fishes which the disciples had come up with and refusing to declare defeat! Instead Jesus blessed the fish and loaves and gave it to the disciples to divide among the multitude. It was ridiculous! Talk about putting the disciples in a bad position – they had given all they had and it could not possibly be enough. They were about to be accosted by 5,000 hungry people – only they were not.

Jesus calmly broke the loaves and fishes and something miraculous happened. The food multiplied. It never says that the food physically multiplied or that the people all were moved to pitch in the food they had brought for their personal use but either way it was a miracle. The food multiplied and the people were filled up. Hallelujah!

Why this story on thanksgiving? Because we need to remember that now, just as then, Jesus can multiply our gifts if we give to Jesus with our whole hearts, holding nothing

back. No matter how small our offerings are, we can minister to multitudes of people hungry for food and spiritual food - if God wills it.

Here is a bit of math you may not have learned in high school but you can ask our Church Treasurer, Suzy Holt, if it is true: Church Treasurers are only allowed to add and subtract - only God can multiply! And God does, each and every day!

This Thanksgiving I want you to have faith in God's ability to multiply our resources.

Yes, we all want enough turkey and dressing and a slice or two of pie but not just that - our finances, our opportunities, our membership roll, our ministries - God can multiply all those things.

This Thanksgiving, don't forget to say a word of thanks for multiplication, one of God's most under appreciated gifts!