

Picking up the pieces can mean many different things. It might mean cleaning up or moving on and away from a disaster. It might feel like a punishment or failure, and it might be a practical and necessary task. It certainly is a change of pace and emotion, but when have you found that you needed to pick up the pieces, and how did that feel for you?

Feeding five thousand, and probably many more, had to seem an impossible task for the disciples to even contemplate, as it is for us today. It would take a miracle, right? But almost lost in the shuffle was the disciples' challenge to pick up the pieces! Think for a moment how that might have been even more of a daunting challenge, especially as they had to be worn out from carrying food to so many!

We focus so much on wondering how Jesus did the miracle, but forget part two of the moment, which maybe was even more dramatic and miraculous. Of course, Jesus can multiply loaves. If the power of God can create a universe it certainly can create a banquet out of bread and fish, but why would Jesus want disciples to gather the scraps?

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What do you think? I am not certain, and not sure if anyone knows for certain, but there had to be a reason! Jesus never did anything without a reason. Did you ever wonder what this was all about?

When I think about leftovers, I am drawn to family life as a kid. Leftovers were a way of life in my family. Feeding a family of seven on an average salary of one parent was not an easy task. Food was precious and nothing was wasted. My reaction to leftovers was usually "yeeeughh!" But as I think about it, we were never hungry, and Mom was good at repurposing before it was fashionable as it is today. In fact, her parents were even better, as anyone who lived in the Depression years understands. I think that they, better than we, understood gifts of God!

The story of disciples filling their baskets is interesting because the task they were given began a new event and ministry moment. For them, leftovers began a new reality. Now the miracle of loaves and fishes was one of extravagance beyond belief! What a reminder that whatever God touches and shares is always more than anyone could have imagined.

But what happened with those leftovers? Bird food? Given to the poor in the local soup kitchen? What, in fact, was the point? Was this simply cleaning up the mess, or was something else going on? There must be a reason we have this story!

When we clean up after a great meal there is a sense of completion. We are glad the party is over, the pressure is gone, and it is a sign that now is the time to move on to something else. All traces of what happened are removed and the table is clear so that

it can be filled again later. So, clean up is no big deal. But what is it like when you must pick up the pieces after divorce? Or a death? Or a lost job? Or when children grow and the family scatters? Those are not necessarily scraps we equate with a miracle, but when touched by God, we should never be surprised about what we find in our basket next.

It is never easy to move on when our life is filled with pain. There is a tremendous effort expended in adopting new perspective, or taking what is left over and figuring out how to move forward again. But often we must. And the greatest help is someone who has been there already or someone who will help pick up the pieces.

I believe the point of disciples gathering was to emphasize Christ gives abundantly, more than enough, and by making themselves part of the cleanup crew Jesus made them wrestle with what they would do with empty baskets now full!

What is consistent about God's miracles is that they always produce even more than what was started with (which is the meaning of grace.) That has been consistent since the first verse of Genesis when there was nothing and suddenly God created a universe! And the story only gets better after that. As the Disciples gathered, now they had something new to share -- full baskets.

They had more than they started with, meaning the miracle of creation continued, just as it does today! God's blessings have a life of their own! Think about the blessings of God, whatever they are, as his gifts of recycling, regeneration, and re-creation!

Have you ever thought that one of the biggest questions for disciples today is to consider how we will utilize the leftovers or remnants of God's miracles?

Anytime God touches a life, there is something more, like a leftover. By picking up the pieces after this miracle, Jesus' disciples were being taught an important lesson. With Jesus on the scene, there is always more to share. Think about the greatest of his miracles at Calvary and the empty tomb. What God did in the most perfect way was to take what was broken, gathered it into a tomb, made it new, and shared it with all!

And we now are brought into that same story! Gifts and blessings in our lives are not just for us, but to share! The miracle of this story is what happened after Jesus got the miracle started! For instance, in my life, if I do not share my healing, or my love, or my blessings, then the gift I have been blessed with is wasted (like basket of leftovers left to rot.) Why 12 baskets? Why 12 disciples? The simplest answer is simply to assume that there was so much floating around that every disciple had a task. Jesus started things off, but his helpers had a role in completing what he started.

Sometimes we think we are too good to waste time picking up the pieces. We would either let someone else do it, or just sweep them into the trash. But maybe picking up

the pieces is a sign of discipleship. It is the work of the Church! Picking up the pieces is all about facing the realities of life and trusting that God has a plan and purpose for all of his creation. And as we are touched by his innumerable miracles, we are reminded that they are gifts that keep on giving, like the best leftovers ever!

Remember how this story first played out. A large crowd was gathered. They had seen signs of God. They were waiting for more. And we are in that crowd today. It is easy to feel as if we have missed out if not at the front of the line, but with God, remember, there is always more than enough! Jesus has indeed filled our "baskets" to overflowing. And when we think they are empty, he calls us to use them to pick up the pieces and start sharing what you have found so tasty and refreshing with those around you.

Understanding Jesus' ministry was about picking up pieces, helps us to understand ours! The gifts of a cross and empty tomb are that God took what was broken, picked it up, and miraculously made it new! We are more than we were before. And now we can help that no one is left behind, left without love, or left without peace. -tws