

We have all seen this happen. Baby birds sit in the nest and as soon as mama bird shows up, their mouths open waiting for food. In fact, anything that moves near them cause their mouths to open for more. That is "dependence!" Similarly, every child expects mom or dad to clothe and be there. Dependence. But birds and babies grow up and the goal is to become free from such dependence. But what happens?

In the story from John's Gospel, Jesus fed 5000 and disappeared. He went across the lake for rest and prayer. But the crowds grabbed their own boats and went after him -- wanting more! More food! Greater miracles! Give us what we want!!! How familiar does that sound? The point of all this is that Jesus is a different kind of messiah. He brings a different kind of nourishment. He seeks to set us free rather than make us more dependent on earthly distractions. Jesus' goal in feeding 5000 was not to make them *dependent* on earthly food, but to *announce true freedom them that heavenly gifts bring*.

His goal was not to keep them from ever being hungry, but to use this miraculous feeding to proclaim that God was in their midst and God's love is the greater gift. Think how easily grace can become an expectation rather than love that sets us free to serve as we have been served. When Jesus fed 5000 it resulted in two trains of thought. For some, it was like winning the lottery and the expectation was that this should be the new "norm." And yet others understood that life could never be the same with the awareness of God's presence, power, and love.

In our culture we have come to the point where anything someone wants is called a "right" and anything we don't have, we assume someone should take care of for us. Is that dependency or freedom? You decide! Our Welfare system is the envy of the world, and yet it could easily become a lifestyle rather than a "safety net." And on the other side, many can become critical of those who are helped rather than rejoice that we have the ability to feed, and clothe, and provide care. All want more! And all want that "more" to be for "me" not someone else.

I knew a young mother, who was the obvious victim of unintentional but real medical malpractice. And that malpractice led to undiagnosed cancer and ultimately her

death. Her friends encouraged her to sue in order to “get what she deserved” and protect her kids. It had to have been a difficult decision, but her response was simple. She said, “I don’t want my children to grow up thinking they can take advantage of someone else just because they made a mistake.” That is the struggle that this text brings to my mind.

Baptism sets us free from slavery and yet we grumble because it's a 'jungle out there!' Communion nourishes us with Christ himself, and we 'miss point of meal' and argue about the shape of the bread or the color of the wine or whether we stand or kneel. Years ago, “expect a miracle” was a popular slogan for some of the faithful (as if God will give anything we want, if only we demand strongly and often enough.) We criticize laziness and dependency in others yet fail to see own slavery to traditions, to things, to fears, to earthly “stuff.”

Israel was set free to learn that *even in wilderness they were never alone and God would provide* what they really needed. Hungry crowds were fed by Jesus not to free them from work, but *to learn God's power was in their midst*. Easter sets us free from death so that nothing in life can ever enslave us! *Every earthly freedom has a cost that someone has to pay for. Our dependency on Jesus is the only true freedom as he has paid the full price, and offers us life in his presence as a gift of grace.*

Our call is not to daily look for more 'Jesus-magic' but to live as people free from sin and death. Faith is not the assurance of earthly gifts, but the affirmation that God's love and presence change the perspective of whatever we live with or without. Don't be so dependent on worldly stuff that you become its slave. Rather give all the energy, attention, and focus on the life which will nourish us forever! Such a lifestyle sets you free to use earthly stuff for God's glory not your satisfaction! Isn't it easier to share when all is understood as “gift?” Isn't it easier to endure when we know God is with us and will care for us forever?

A familiar proverb states, “Give someone a fish and they have food for a day. Teach them to fish and they have food for lifetime.” That is the difference between dependence and freedom! Between looking for pieces to pick up and celebrating the gifts that have already been shared.

Have you ever considered that our list of "needs" is a barometer of faith?? When that list is all we spend time on, faith gets left in the dust. When faith is the focus of our living, doesn't that list get a lot shorter? It is the same thing we all learn growing up. When I was younger, I spent a lot of time gathering stuff that could "hand down" to my kids. I wanted them to have what I didn't. Now I learn that my stuff isn't what they are concerned about at all, and I have to figure out how to clean out my basement and garage because a lot of my needs of the past just don't seem as important now.

It reminds me of the parable about the rich farmer with too much and his response was to build more barns so that he could keep it all. Jesus words were that "real life" is more than food and clothing. I have learned the hard way, as I look at what I have collected over the years which my dependencies have led to unanticipated burdens.

God has worked miracles in our lives so that we need NOT live like baby birds (always begging God for more), but that we WILL celebrate our lives and live with the FULL-NESS that God has given. If death is conquered; if forgiveness is a gift; and if Heavenly peace is our home, that "colors" everything, and anything else that we do or face? This is the difference between praying for needs and praying to give thanks! Understand that being "faithful" is simply letting faith "FILL!" Begin faith FULL means that we can never be hungry or thirsty again!