

I would like to take you back to a time long ago. As I'm sure you've heard before, Ellen White tells us that it would be good for us to spend a "**thoughtful hour**" each day in contemplation of Christ's life. She invites us let "**the imagination grasp each scene.**" Obviously, we do not want to let our imaginations run wild and make up things that have no biblical basis. Nor are we going to take everything we imagine as exactly how it happened. But it would be beneficial to revisit an old story and try to try draw new lessons from it.

So go back with me to about AD 29 and live a day or two in the life of a young boy or girl in Israel.

Unlike the current weather in cold Vermont or New Hampshire, it is spring time in the Middle East and the weather is just turning warm. After a mild "winter" season, in which there was quite a bit of rainfall, the days have turned sunny and you find yourself doing the one thing you enjoy doing the most: for hours and hours on end each day you play along the shores of the **Sea of Galilee**. With playful curiosity and bridled mischief, you enjoy the company of the sea's inhabitants. There are turtles to play with, birds to chase. You explore boats that have returned to shore after a long day of fishing.

Your dad is among the fishermen who have returned to Galilee's northern shores. He has spent eight hours on the sea, and his efforts have not been fruitless. His nets are filled with about 600 pounds of sardines, all ready to be salted and processed for resale or consumption. As best as your 12 year old arms can, you help your dad bring in the nets, mend, wash, dry and fold them. It

is tough work, but you help your dad out as much as you can. Finally, after a lot of time spent on the shores of Galilee—playing and helping out your dad—you are ready to head home. And so, the two of you, father and child, walk the dusty roads toward your home in Bethsaida, just a few minutes away from the water.

As you walk, your father and you carry on a conversation about the world that surrounds you. And then he shares something with you that captures your attention. He tells you that Andrew and Simon are supposed to in the area. These are the same brothers, Andrew and Simon, who used to be fisherman with your dad. You can remember them vividly, even though they have not worked with your dad for a few years.

Andrew was a nice man who always seemed to pay particular attention to you. Simon, on the other hand, was quick-tempered and always seemed to have vulgarity spewing from his mouth. Even though they were quite successful in their fishing trade, curiously one day they gave it all up and began following a Man around whose name was Jesus. From then on, whenever you would see Andrew and Simon, you noticed that their demeanor had changed, especially Simon's. No longer was he swearing up a storm. Although he was still quick-tempered, he seemed to have a more pleasant attitude.

You can't imagine why this is so, although you have an inkling in your 12 year old mind that it has something to do with the Man who they had been following around for two years. For some reason, this Man Jesus seemed to be able to change lives—both physically and emotionally. You

had heard some stories about Him. He had been healing people—blind people were all of a sudden able to see, those who couldn't walk were running around. And He told incredible stories.

And so as you walk home with your father, you make up your mind right then and there that you are going to find Andrew and Simon, along with their Teacher, Jesus. So you ask your dad, **“Can we go see Andrew and Simon tomorrow? I would also like to meet their Teacher, Jesus.”**

Without hesitation, your dad replies, **“No, no. We cannot do that. There is a lot to do tomorrow. There are more fish to be caught. It has been a bad winter and today was the first day that we brought in a big catch. And besides, I doubt that we'd even be able to meet that Teacher of theirs.”**

Disappointed, you persist, **“But dad, I think it would be worth our time. Please . . . can we go?”** But your dad still won't hear of it, **“I cannot go. But perhaps when we get home we can talk to your mother.”**

Hardly able to contain yourself, you dash off to get home and talk with your mother. She is there, sweeping the house and preparing supper. Without hesitation, you blurt out, **“Mom, can we please go to see Andrew and Simon tomorrow? They are going to be in the area with their Teacher, Jesus!”** Unfortunately, your mother will not hear anything of it, either. She has too much to do tomorrow, she says, and she doesn't have time to go traipsing around the country side. **“Besides,”** she says, **“It will be Passover in the next few days, and I need to make preparations for our trip to Jerusalem. You know that.”**

Still persistent, yet not disrespectful, you plead, “**Well, can I please go by myself, then?**” This seems to give your mother reason for pause, and you can see her mulling over the idea in her head. Finally, she gives in, “**Yes, you can go. But only if you help me a little this evening.**”

You are willing to do anything at this point—anything to go and see this group of men you’ve heard so much about. So, the cooperative 12 year old that you are, you help your mother out that evening with all she asks of you. And then you had to bed with visions of excitement for the next day.

You can hardly sleep, though. You have heard so much about this Man, Jesus. And you always enjoyed seeing Andrew when he worked with your dad. Simon, well, Simon wasn’t always the most pleasant guy in the world, but it will be nice to see him also because he has seemed to have a change of character. Finally, though, you fall asleep and the morning comes soon enough.

Up bright and early, your dad has already left for the sea once again. He has a long day’s work ahead of him before your trip to Jerusalem. Your mother is stirring downstairs as well, busy with something that needs to be done on her long list of duties before Passover. When you approach her, you notice that she is making food once again.

“**What are you doing?**” you ask her.

“I am making you a lunch. You will probably be gone for a long time and, chances are, you will get hungry.” *What a nice mother I have, you think, always worried about your needs.*

“You’re a growing child,” she says, **“I have made you five little sandwiches, and I’m going to give you two pieces of Fried Chick.”**

Fried Chick! Your favorite. You can hardly wait to eat your lunch. You are salivating over the thought already. While you eat a little breakfast, though, your mother takes the sandwiches and Fried Chick and puts them in a nice little brown paper bag. And soon enough, you’re on your way.

Again you hit the dusty roads of Galilee’s northern shores. You are not exactly sure where you are heading, but you look out over the Sea as the sun rises over the eastern skies, illuminating the blue waters of Galilee’s famed water. There are dozens of fishing vessels already converged upon the waters, with their little lanterns aglow as fishermen cast their nets and haul them in, hoping for a big catch.

As you ponder the scene before you, one of your best friends, Benjamin, has just spotted you and invites you for a day full of adventures along the sandy shores of the lake. Not even tempted by the invitation, you tell him that you are headed to see the Man they call Jesus. Almost in shock, Benjamin blurts out, **“What? Are you serious? That isn’t any fun! Why don’t you come down with me to the lake. We can build forts and play in the sand.”**

“Not today, Benjamin,” you reply, **“I am going to try and meet Jesus.”**

“There is no way you are going to meet Him,” he responds, **“You probably won’t even be able to see Him!”**

Nonetheless, you continue on your way towards the center of Bethsaida, hopeful that there will be further word about where Jesus and His band of followers may be heading. And then, almost upon request, you notice a bunch of people quickly walking toward the other side of town. You hear them saying to one another, **“He is on His way! They have almost reached shore.”**

Convinced that they are speaking about Jesus, you run in the same direction that they are running, with sack lunch in hand.

You run as fast as your little legs can run, anxious to see the Man that you’ve heard a lot about. Following the crowd, you make your way to the north side of town, towards the area where the Jordan River flows into the Sea of Galilee. There is a little raised ground, with a lot of plush green grass, that overlooks the blue waters of the lake there. You have played in these fields often, among the olive groves and fruit orchards that dot the lush country side.

Sure enough, when you arrive there, hundreds of people have gathered, all with their eyes firmly focused on the waters of Galilee. People are talking loudly back and forth, excited about the fishing boat that is nearing the shores. Finally, you look out and see a boat, not more than 30 feet long, making its way towards the grassy area. With little hesitation, you count how many men are in the boat: *one, two, three, four . . .* there are thirteen men in the boat. Though you can’t

make out the figures very well, your eyes scan the men in the boat, curious to see if, in fact, Andrew and Simon are present.

Sure enough, you recognize the two of them, as well as a third man, whose face you cannot quite place. Finally, the boat reaches the shore and it's almost as if the whole crowd converges upon the 13 men. They hardly have time to let their paddles down when people approach the group. People are carrying their loved ones and laying them on the sand of the shore, hoping that healing will be brought to their debilitated bodies. Blind men and women are making their way through the crowd as well, almost in mass hysteria. They, too, want healing from Jesus.

You find yourself at the back of the large group and you can hardly see what is happening in front of you. It is almost mass hysteria, and through a few openings in the crowd, you can see this Man that everyone is screaming for climb out of the boat. He is a fairly ordinary looking Man, with a thick beard and brown hair. To your 12 year old mind, it almost appears as though His spirits are lagging a little bit, as if someone He knew had just died. You almost feel sorry for Him. He cannot go anywhere without being mobbed by a huge crowd.

But almost as soon as His face looks stern and serious, a smile breaks forth from His mouth and He starts talking with the crowd, picking up small children, and laying His hands on people who approach Him for healing. Blown away by His generosity, you notice that He even touches people who are evidently plagued with leprosy. Each time He places His hands on people in need of healing, they instantly become better and start crying uncontrollably with joy. Without fail, each person that approaches Him is healed, and they cannot contain their joy.

Finally, after, what seems a couple hours of attending to people's personal needs, He convinces the crowd to retreat a little so He can say a few words. Not wanting to be so far back, you stealthily navigate your small body towards the front of the crowd, and find a place on the green grass 10 or 15 feet away from where Jesus and His closest disciples are standing.

And then Jesus starts talking to the whole crowd. He begins to tell stories—stories like you have never heard before. He takes ordinary, every day experiences that are familiar to most of the crowd—stories of fishing, or farming, or families—and makes a spiritual point about them. The stories are so simple, yet they are profound. Even you, though you're only twelve years old, can understand the truths that He is sharing.

You are blown away by what He is saying. You've never heard stories like this before. You've never heard the Bible being explained like this. Before you know it, as Jesus stands there, painting pictures in your mind, as well as everyone else's, the day is quickly fleeting away. The morning sun has turned into the afternoon sun, but still you are enthralled with what this Man Jesus is sharing. You are so excited that you nearly forget that you haven't eaten since early in the morning.

And then, almost without warning, Jesus comes to the end of His stories and starts talking with His disciples, just as you hear a big growl in your stomach, reminding you of the fact that you have not eaten in five or six hours. Thankfully, your mother made you a sack lunch. On this

unseasonably hot April afternoon, those five sandwiches and two pieces of Fried Chick are going to taste good.

So you pick up your little brown paper bag and reach into it, only to notice something out of the corner of your eye. It appears as though no one around you has brought anything to eat. You stand up a little bit to survey the crowd, wondering if you can find anyone else who has brought a sack lunch. But you don't see anyone who has.

And then you hear something else as well. You hear Jesus, talking to this third man you recognized on the boat. Trying to listen closely, you hear Jesus say to him, **“Philip, where can we buy bread around here, so we can give these poor people something to eat?”** And then you notice that Jesus doesn't have a lunch either, nor do any of His disciples. Responding to Jesus' question, though, you hear Philip say, **“Even if we had a thousand dollars, we wouldn't have enough to feed everyone here. There has to be four or five thousand people here, and that's not even including the women and children.”**

And then the rest of the disciples start breaking out in conversation, discussing different options of feeding the large crowd. One suggests that they send everyone into the different towns and have them buy their own food, but Jesus doesn't like this idea.

Finally, you look down at your side, with one of your sandwiches in your right hand, and the paper bag in the other hand, and an idea crosses your mind. *I don't need my sack lunch*, you

think to yourself, *I will give it to Jesus. At least He'll have something to eat, and maybe He can even spread it out a bit so that other people can enjoy it.*

And so, ever so timidly, you get up off the ground and gingerly start walking towards Jesus and His disciples. You head right towards Andrew, the one who you at least know a little bit. With a bit of hesitation, you brush his arm with your hand, hoping to get his attention. It takes a few attempts to finally get him to turn around. Almost half-surprised, he sees you and a big smile comes over his face, signifying that he recognizes you, even if it is ever so vaguely. **“I know you!”** he says, **“You are Jacob’s son, aren’t you?”**

“Yes, I am!” you say excitedly.

“You have gotten so big.” He remarks. **“You must be helping your dad out a lot. And your parents must be feeding you a ton.”**

“Yes, I try to,” you say. And then you try to work up your courage to broach the subject of lunch with him. Finally, ever so gingerly, you say to him, **“In fact, I . . . I brought a little sack lunch with me today.”** Andrew looks down at your side and notices the paper bag, **“And I . . . I know it’s not a lot, but I wanted to give it to Jesus, and perhaps He can eat it or do something with it.”**

Not sure if the expression on Andrew's face is indicating he is surprised over your generosity, or if he's laughing at the thought of taking your small sack lunch, he replies, **"Oh, no, we could never take your lunch. You are a growing boy. You need all the nourishment you can get."**

"No! Please, I'd like to give it to you. There are a lot of hungry people here, and I don't really need anything." Realizing that you will not be denied, Andrew relents. **"All right,"** he says, **"We will see what we can do."**

And then he puts his arm around your shoulder and takes a few paces with you towards Jesus, who is still talking with His other disciples about their plan. Waiting for an opportune time, Andrew finally speaks up and says, **"Jesus, there is a lad here who has brought his sack lunch. He has five little sandwiches and a couple of pieces of Fried Chick. He would like to give it to help feed You and everyone else. But it's hardly enough even to feed You."**

And then Jesus turns, and looks down and notices you, the little child that you are. It's almost as if He is in awe over the kind gesture that you have extended. He looks down at the little paper bag in your right hand, and then looks back up at Andrew and says, **"All right. Have everyone sit down in an orderly fashion, and we'll start distributing this little lad's sack lunch."**

Almost hesitant about the instructions, Andrew leaves your side and rounds up the other disciples to help organize the large crowd into orderly groups. And as they are doing this, you just stand there, You and Jesus. You are nervously silent. Your 12 year old mind cannot think of anything to say. And then, Jesus steps closer, and stoops down, His long robe brushing the dirty

ground. Almost automatically, you reach up your right hand, the brown paper bag crumpled from a long day, and you hand it to Jesus. In a beautifully melodious voice, Jesus simply says, **“Thank you for sharing your lunch with Me.”** And then as He stands back up, He pats you on the head and then retreats to where His disciples are standing.

You just stand in quiet amazement. You have just shared your lunch with Jesus. You cannot believe it. The rest of the day almost seems like it is a blur to you. From that one little sack lunch, Jesus prayed over it and fed the whole multitude. Every time He reached His hand back into the bag, there was another sandwich and another piece of Fried Chick. Not one person went home hungry that day and, most importantly, Jesus was fed from that little sack lunch that your mother made for You.

In fact, when it was all said and done, there was even food left over. The disciples collected it all and sent it home with people who needed it particularly. Andrew even made sure that you had plenty of food to share with your parents. Perhaps they would be compelled to learn more about Jesus after they saw the miracle that had been wrought through their son’s sack lunch.

With excitement, you race home at the end of the day. You can hardly contain yourself when you enter the house, bombastic with news from your encounter with Jesus. Your parents have to calm you down as you relate the days events to them. They can hardly believe you when you tell them the story. But the proof is in the pudding. You reach into your brown paper bag and retrieve 20 sandwiches and 10 pieces of Fried Chick. They stand in amazement as they realize that, perhaps, there is something to this Man called Jesus. Now they, too, want to see Him for themselves.

Fast forward 2000 years or so. Can you imagine feeding 5000 people with a little sack lunch? More importantly, can you imagine feeding *Jesus—the Son of God*—with your feeble food? I can't imagine the joy that that little lad must have had, when he knew that he contributed to Jesus' well-being. And I can't imagine the joy on Jesus' heart when He saw that little boy, extending by faith the little that he had.

It is awfully tempting to feel as though we don't have a lot to contribute to God's cause. "**Oh, I only have a little sack lunch,**" we may say, "**I don't have much. God has not blessed me with tremendous ability or talent.**" Then again, maybe He has. Whatever God has blessed us with, though, He asks us to return it *all* to Him.

What a picture of God, after all, in this little, nameless lad. He emptied out His brown paper bag for Jesus and the well-being of 5000 people. God emptied out all of heaven for us.

So I guess the question then becomes: **did Jesus need this little boy?** I'd like to read a little devotional thought that I received a couple months ago, that speaks to this very subject. I thought the author expressed things very poignantly and gave me some food for thought, no pun intended. He expresses this idea a little better than I do, probably. So listen to what he writes:

In a discussion with some young people we got hung up on a question about an unknown boy. His unknown mother had baked him five little barley loaves, and cooked two small fishes, all to be his lunch. Whatever fun outing he had planned that day, he went instead to hear Jesus preach. That showed some faith, didn't it? At the meeting, his interest was such that he came down near the front and apparently mingled with the Twelve. Hungry late in the day, he wanted to eat his lunch as much as anybody, but he heard Jesus tell the Twelve to feed the people,

5000. He heard the apostles bewail their lack of food, and childlike in his gladsome enthusiasm told Andrew that he would give his lunch to Jesus.

That showed a commendable denial of self for a hungry boy, didn't it? Was he motivated by the love of Christ? Was he helping Jesus, or only as a 2-year old "helps" you sweep the floor? (John 6:1-11.)

Jesus accepted the little boy's sacrifice, thanked His Father for the pitifully little gift in His hands, prayed for His blessing upon it, and forthwith fed the 5000 with its multiplied bounty.

Now for the question: did He need that little boy's sacrificial lunch? If the child had refused to give it, could Jesus have fed that multitude? Thereupon in our discussion, we split. Most said, "Yes, He could have brought manna down from heaven!" I asked, "Suppose we individually refuse to do our duty in telling the world the gospel message, can the Lord use someone else?" "Yes," was the immediate response; "He'll use the angels; they'll finish the work!"

To me that sounded like a dangerous cop-out. Why bother to answer the Holy Spirit's convictions of duty? Reach for your remote and flip on the TV. The angels will finish God's work!

I maintained that the Lord Jesus needed that little boy's gift of his lunch. Yes, He could have brought down manna from heaven, but He would not any more than He would change those stones in the wilderness into bread (Matt. 4). I believe that little boy was tremendously important that day. Jesus really did need Him. The conclusion of course is, He really needs you, too; if you cop out, someone will be lost. Am I wrong??¹

There will be varying opinions on this matter, no doubt, but I believe the author is on to something. In a literal, objective sense, God doesn't need our help at all. But He has chosen to base His government on the humble strategy of relying on feeble human beings like us. We, too, can be nameless heroes who share our lunches with Jesus and, ultimately, the community around us.

Interestingly, there is a group of individuals down the road from us here in West Lebanon who number about 5000 as well, not counting faculty and staff. Though it's not the only group of

¹ Taken from Robert J. Wieland, *Dial Daily Bread* devotional thought.

people in the area who need to be fed, **the 5000 at Dartmouth College** have a deep hunger for what we can give them. They may not quite understand what they're hungering for, but I believe God has blessed us with the ability to take our feeble sack lunches and offer them to Jesus, so that He can take and distribute them as He sees necessary.

We may not have a lot that would seem to attract such people. We may not have the intellect, the abilities, the money that would draw this people into union with God, but **the same God who took a little nameless lad's sack lunch and fed 5000 people, can take our feeble efforts and feed 5000 students.** And when we feed them, we also feed God, who has an incredible hunger for such people to have a deepening understanding of Him.

Are we going to give God our sack lunches?

No, those 5000 at Dartmouth are not the only ones around here who need to be fed, but it's a start. Are we not compelled, by the God who emptied Himself for us, to empty ourselves for them?

We may not feel that we have a lot we can contribute, but I love that quote by Ellen White that I've shared with a number of you before, I'm sure. Listen to her words. Think about them. Meditate on them. Ponder them. Believe them. **"There is no limit to the usefulness of one who, putting self aside, makes room for the working of the Holy Spirit upon his heart and lives a**

life wholly consecrated to God.² No limit, friends. No limit. Jesus took a little sack lunch and did marvelous things. He can take your sack lunch and do even greater things. There is no limit.

I love those words that Andrew spoke to Jesus in John's account. There are just five, simple words that speak unbelievably to the way a young boy rose to the occasion. Five simple words: **"There is a lad here . . ."** And with those five, simple words, Jesus fed five thousand people.

Would it be said of this congregation in such a time as this? **"There is a lad here."** **"There is a girl here."** **"There is a man here."** **"There is a woman here."** Could that be said of us?

Is there a lad here? *Is there?*

² Ellen White, *Ministry of Healing*, 159.