

Famine in the year 2017 threatens 20 million people — more than at any time since World War II. The areas affected most are Somalia, Nigeria, Sudan, and Yemen. The reason why is because there has been no rain there for a long long time – the worst drought in a generation, some news reports say. Further, each of these four countries are in a protracted conflict. The threat of violence can limit or prohibit aid workers' access to affected regions, and in some cases, starvation may be a deliberate war tactic. . The sad thing is, there is plenty of food in the world to help these people. But our world is sinful, which means that human selfishness and corruption stand in the way of everyone getting fed. It seems like this is a problem that is too big for anyone to fix.

There are lots of problems like that in the world today, aren't there? Problems too big for anyone to fix. How will we ever stop North Korea and Iran from developing nuclear weapons? Choke them with sanctions, but they'll still get what they need under the table, and continue their quest to build nuclear weapons. These are big problems. Are they too big for anyone to fix? Do you have any problems that are so big, they seem unfixable? A constant struggle with depression? Anxiety issues? Problems in the family? Health issues that don't go away? Have you ever had a problem that seemed too big for anyone to fix?

This morning, we're going to look at Jesus, and his miracle of the feeding of the 5000. We are going to learn how we can have a Big Faith, even as we experience Big Problems in our world. A Christian can have hope and confidence and joy and optimism, no matter how big the problem is in his life. For "We Can Count on Jesus To Help!"

The Feeding of the Five Thousand took place on the remote coastline of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus arrived at this location by boat to be alone with his disciples. One reason he wanted peace and quiet was to digest the news that his cousin, John the Baptist, had been beheaded by King Herod. The other reason was that he had been so busy healing and teaching that he and his disciples hadn't even time to eat. A little break. A little respite. That's what Jesus was aiming for.

How do you think Jesus felt then when he arrived at this remote location only to find that the crowds had followed him there on foot? If I were Jesus, I would have felt like the Richard Dreyfuss character in the movie "What About Bob?" Poor Dr. Leo Marvin. That successful psychiatrist just wanted to escape his practice for a while but one persistent patient, "Bob" played by Bill Murray, showed up at Dr. Marvin's vacation home and wouldn't leave. Eventually Bob drove Dr. Marvin crazy.

You don't need to be a busy psychiatrist to know how it feels to have your "problems" from work or going to the doctor follow you home at night or tag along when you travel to see family up north. I know how I would have dealt with the crowd Jesus found waiting for him. "Keep sailing, Peter. We'll land at another port where they can't find us!" But that's not what Jesus did. Mark records the following: "When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd" Instead thoughts of anger and resentment, Jesus felt sorry for the crowd. And what kind of crowd are we talking about here? We're not talking about a few dozen well-mannered autograph-seekers. We're talking desperate people. Thousands of them. Many of them sick. In spite of that, Luke tells us that Jesus welcomed them.

Here's the first reason we can count on Jesus. We can count on Jesus because when he looks at us, he doesn't see people who should be avoided but people to embrace the way a shepherd embraces a lamb. Don't feel like a cuddly little lamb? Don't think

Jesus would want to touch you or your problems with a ten-foot pole? That may be true of others, those who say that they are your friends but then talk about you behind your back. It may have even been true of people in the church. You thought you could come to a place like this and find comfort and refuge but were put off by how vindictive Christians could be. I'm glad to say Jesus is not like me. Even we pastors get cranky and would sometimes rather not answer the phone because we just want some peace and quiet. Not Jesus though. His love for you is perfect. His love for you is constant. His love doesn't keep office hours.

So how exactly did Jesus welcome this desperate crowd? He healed them. Medical problems – diseases, illness, deformities, sicknesses – problems too big for anyone to handle – and there in those hills Jesus healed them – no problem was too big for Jesus to handle. You'd expect that but he also did something you wouldn't expect. He taught them about the kingdom of God. This reminds us that the best thing Jesus does for us is teach us about life, death, sin, grace, heaven, and hell. And who better? Jesus is the Son of God and so knows everything there is to know about spirituality. I mean he invented it. Sadly we often disregard this essential thing Jesus has to offer. Instead we want him to feed us. To fix our marriage. To make us look prettier or stronger. To make retirement more positive with zero health issues. But what he wants to do above all, Friends, is to take you to heaven with him. That's what he wanted for that desperate crowd so he taught them. He taught them that they each had a problem with sin. Some of their sins were obvious like unkind words, and thieving hands. Other sins were not so obvious but equally damning in God's eyes. For example, in their rush to see Jesus, had some in the crowd fallen to the ground? If so, I wonder how many people walked by without offering a helping hand? Failure to help others is the sin of selfishness. Jesus wants us to know about our sin too. He doesn't want us to think that because we haven't ever been arrested that God is pleased with the words that we speak or the looks we give. Each of us is in need of a savior.

While the crowd that came to Jesus was a crowd of sinners, there was at least one good quality about them. They had been zealous in their search for Jesus. Not even a 10 mile journey on foot into the wilderness deterred them. Are we as zealous in our pursuit of Jesus, or was the 30-minute drive to church this morning about all you're willing to commit to? Here's why a 10 mile journey on foot isn't too much to commit to when pursuing Jesus. Jesus not only tells us about our sin, he tells us about salvation. No, he does more than tell us about salvation; he won our salvation. He did that by dying on the cross. That's something Jesus must have told the crowd about there on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. He must have explained to them that God demanded a payment of blood for their sins. This was a payment Jesus made on their behalf and ours, like a big brother taking the spanking for something you did. This is the most important reason to count on Jesus. Count on him for eternal life because he has forgiven all of your sins by paying for them.

But there are other reasons we can count on Jesus as the Feeding of the Five Thousand demonstrates. Let's take a closer look at the events that led to that miracle. We're told that as Jesus saw the crowd coming towards him, he casually asked a disciple named Philip: "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" Jesus asked the question to exercise Philip's faith for we're told that Jesus already knew what he was going to do. This is yet another reason we can count on Jesus. We can count on him

because he not only loves us and has compassion on us, he knows what we need even before we do. Even right now Jesus knows what you need. Is it a few good Christian friends? Less anxiety? Better health? If so, he will provide those blessings at the right time. Just be patient. But don't be surprised if he doesn't give you the things you think you need, for as someone once said: "God prefers to develop our character, not our comfort; he seeks to perfect, not pamper." So is your life one emergency after another? Are you uncertain how you're going to make it to the next day, much less to the next paycheck? God allows these harsh realities to help us remember how foolish it is to count on ourselves. And thank goodness we don't need to count on ourselves. We can count on Jesus to get us through our everyday emergencies! Let's return to our text to find out why.

When evening approached the disciples urged Jesus to send the crowds back to the villages to buy food. Their attitude was "Don't bother the Master and us." But Jesus said: "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat". Philip was ready to answer that seemingly foolish suggestion. "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" he exclaimed. At least Andrew, Peter's brother, went looking for available resources but reported: "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" As well as Philip and Andrew could figure, there was no way to feed the crowd. They had counted their resources and it just didn't add up. What they failed to do, of course, was count on Jesus. They forgot that Jesus could multiply. Hadn't he done that at that wedding in Cana? Couldn't he do that again here to feed the crowds? And that's exactly what Jesus did. He took the bread, gave thanks to God for it, broke it and gave it to his disciples to distribute. This they did until everyone had enough to eat. In fact there was so much food that the disciples collected twelve basketfuls of leftovers.

Wow! We can count on Jesus because he not only knows what we need, he gives us what we need in abundance. But what about those starving people on the other side of the world? Doesn't Jesus care about them? Of course he does. It's not Jesus' fault they're hungry. While people go hungry, governments pay farmers not to plant as much. If only we could understand that God wants us who have much to share in the task of feeding the world! But be careful. This true story is not about sharing; it's about Jesus and who he is. Jesus is the Son of God who cares about us, who knows our needs, and who satisfies those needs – the most important of which is the need for forgiveness.

The disciples never pictured themselves walking around with baskets, feeding thousands of people way up in the hills, in the middle of nowhere. But with Jesus, anything is possible. What about you? Can you picture yourself in heaven someday? It will happen. Can you picture yourself facing big problems head-on? It will happen. No problem in your life is too big for Jesus to handle. He's right here with us, and he can do anything. Sometimes, he can even cause us to do things that you or I never thought we'd ever be doing.

May God bless us with big faith as we face big problems in our lives, and in our world. May we see Jesus, in the background of every problem we face, and may we trust him to bless us, and work through us, in all things, Amen.