

## Lent 4 (2026)

Dr. Charles Allen was a much-beloved Methodist minister. In the late '40s and throughout the '50s he was at Grace Methodist Church in Atlanta. During his tenure, Grace became the largest Methodist congregation in the state.

An interesting sidenote is that his first pastorate was in Blue Ridge.

Dr. Allen was also a newspaper columnist. He wrote first for the Atlanta papers and later for the Houston [Texas] Chronicle.

A story Dr. Allen tells in *God's Psychiatry*, one of his many inspirational books, is of an orphanage in war-ravaged Europe following the Second World War.

The children in this facility were very young. Many were at the point of starvation when brought in.

In their new home, they were well fed; yet many were fretful at night and had difficulty sleeping.

One of the workers hit upon an idea. A slice of bread was placed in each child's hand at night when he was put to bed.

This bread was not to be eaten but held. It represented security. It said in a concrete way: "Your needs are being met and will be met."

It worked. From then on, most of the children went off to sleep readily and slept peacefully through the night.

God wants all His children to have the same security, that is, the knowledge that we have a

generous provider in Heaven. This Provider is spoken of in the Twenty-third Psalm:

**“The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul.”**

Further, we find in scripture God providing for the needs of His ancient people in the days of Moses. When they lacked food in the wilderness, He gave them bread from heaven; manna as it was called.

We likewise find the same God providing food for those in today’s Gospel who had followed Jesus into a desolate area to hear Him teach.

God remains the Great Provider. You and I don’t need to be anxious about our daily needs. Like the children in the orphanage, we need to

clutch our slice of bread, which is God's promises given to us in scripture.

**“Behold the fowls of the air:”** we hear Jesus say in Matthew 6:26, **“for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?”**

And then a few verses down, **“Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things [material things] shall be added unto you”** (33).

And then in John 6: Jesus gives these reassuring words: **“I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”**

*God provides* is a wonderful truth. One we should embrace and never let go of. Nevertheless, it is not the only truth we find in this morning's Gospel. There is a second of

equal importance: **The God who provides invites us to join in in this operation.**

Returning to the story, Jesus is the first to notice that there is a problem . . . that there is a multitude out there that needs to be fed. But before acting, He turns to Philip, one of the Twelve, and asks:

**“Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?”**

Philip is apparently a very pragmatic, number-oriented person and responds:

**“Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.”**

From a purely human standpoint, Philip is right. He accurately assesses the situation. Even if there had been an Ingles or Food Lion around

the corner, the cost of feeding such a crowd would have been prohibitive.

The amount Philip quotes, two hundred denarii, is more than an average person made in half a year.

What he is saying is that the situation is hopeless.

What he does NOT factor into his assessment is that the One standing before him possesses the power of the living God.

Likely Philip had been present when Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding of Cana. But now his vision was earthbound. He was thinking solely in human terms . . . what he as a man could do.

Are we not at times like Philip?

We find ourselves in a desperate situation and instead of turning to God for help we try to sort matters out on our own.

Are you dealing with any impossible situations in your life at this time? If you are, bring them before the One who has no limits.

**Say, “I don’t have a clue which way to go or what to do, but I know you have untold resources at your disposal, please take charge.”**

In the words of Samuel Wesley’s anthem:

Lead me, Lord, lead me in thy  
righteousness;  
make thy way plain before my face.  
For it is thou, Lord, thou, Lord, only,  
that makest me dwell in safety.

Back to our story. Next enters Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. It was Andrew, you will remember, who brought Peter to Jesus.

Bringing people to Jesus seems to have been Andrew's way, and we can learn from him in this regard. All around us are people who need the Lord. Who will tell them, if we don't?

In any case, on this occasion, Andrew brings a little boy with a boxed lunch to Jesus.

Andrew is no less perplexed than Philip as to how to feed the hungry crowd. Yet he brings what is at hand to Jesus and hands the problem over to Him.

At this point Jesus assumes control of the situation.

He **takes**, **blesses** and **breaks** the bread in the little boy's lunch pail. It is interesting to note that Jesus uses here the same actions He will use

at the Last Supper. The similarities have caused the Feeding of the Five Thousand to be called “the Galilean Lord’s Supper.”

In both cases, the bread of earth becomes the bread of heaven.

But onto my second main point. Jesus does what only God can do: He provides by multiplying the bread. But what does He do next? /// He hands over the bread and fish to the disciples to distribute.

The application is clear. Feeding the hungry is God’s business, but you and I have a part to play in this operation.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:9 writes: **“For we are labourers together with God.”**

We see the disciples taking on that role that day, and this is the roll God wants each one of us to take on. His work, our hands.

And it is not just material bread we are to hand out, but spiritual, the bread of life, the Gospel which transforms the lives of individuals as well as communities and nations.

What work is He calling you to do? What is He calling me to do?

Well for sure, opportunities abound. You encounter people I may never meet.

God has placed each one of us where we are for a purpose. Seek that purpose daily. Open your eyes. Listen for the still small voice. Heed the Master's call.

The roll of those in the ordained ministry for sure is to represent Christ wherever they go, but the same is true for all who have passed through the waters of baptism.

We come together on Sunday to hear God's Word, to be nourished with the bread of heaven,

to be equipped and then to be sent back into the world to bear witness to the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

The God who provides is doing to you what He did to the Twelve at the Feeding of the Five Thousand. He is handing you a basket of bread to hand out.

Think of it this way, keep clutching the slice of bread in your hand – the promises of God. Let that slice give you security and peace.

But don't stop there. Expanding the story with which I began, the story from Dr. Allen's book . . . go to work putting slices of bread into the hands of others.

Allow me to end with some words by the Scottish hymn writer Jane Borthwick:

Cast off gloomy doubt and faithless fear!  
No arm so weak but may do service here.  
Though feeble agents, may we all fulfill  
God's righteous will.

Come, labor on.