

Weekly Encouragement

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Incorporated non-profit in New Jersey, USA

Carpe Diem

By Rev. Peter Eng



"Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to set before the people." (Luke 9:16)

The twelve disciples had been preaching the gospel and healing the sick in the towns in Galilee ([Lk 9:1ff](#)). The people were impressed. If the disciples could do these, how much more the master? At that time, Herod the Tetrarch had beheaded John the Baptist, but was now on edge on account of his wicked action. Herod wanted to meet Jesus - no doubt a euphemism for arresting him. So Jesus and his disciples had to go off to a deserted place. But the crowds were eager to have more of Jesus. By word of mouth, they came to this deserted place to hear from the master himself.

As the day wore on, and it came close to dinner time, the disciples advised Jesus the only sensible thing to do, "Master, send the crowd to the neighbouring small towns to get food." They said that because the closest small town could

not feed 5,000 people without notice. But Jesus was thinking along a totally different track! Jesus' solution was, "You give them something to eat." They had nothing except for the sacrificial giving of a little boy who had five little loaves (more like sliders) and two fish (like herring). It was a small lunch packed by a loving mother for her little boy. It would be like a packet of five sliders and two herrings. With this, Jesus fed 5,000 men plus women and children, and had twelve baskets left.

This event is so important that it is recorded in all four Gospels. There are several major themes in this event. For instance, (1) The Jews were reminded of Yahweh feeding the people in the wilderness, and this tells them Jesus is the Messiah; (2) It foreshadows the breaking of bread at the Last Supper, and the Lord's Supper, and perhaps even the marriage feast of the Lamb. There is a minor point in this event to which I wish to draw our attention. It is the leadership of Jesus Christ towards his disciples.

Jesus commanded, "You give them something to eat." This must come across as impossibility. Philip made it clear they did not have enough money to feed the people. In addition, the planning that goes into feeding 5,000 people in the desert when Herod wants to "meet" Jesus is no trifle. When God directs us to do something extraordinary, where do we turn? We look at our resources and our ordinary methods, and say, "I don't see how we can do this." Perhaps, it would have been better to simply ask Jesus, "Lord, how do you want us to do this?"

We live ordinary lives and most of the time, we do ordinary things. There is joy and peace in the ordinary done extraordinarily well. However, once in a while, God gives us opportunities to do extraordinary things. While we bemoan the ordinary, we also balk at the extraordinary.

Jesus set an example of spiritual leadership for his disciples. His actions show us what it means to do extraordinary things for God when some cannot see God's hand in what must be a wacky proposal. We are so accustomed to the ordinary that when God calls us to extraordinary work, our minds remain in the rut of the ordinary.

Jesus did not try to build consensus, or to empower them with ownership of the vision, or any of the ordinary means of spiritual leadership (even though these are all good). Jesus just went ahead without a democratic referendum. By engaging the disciples in gathering the people and distributing the food, he lets them participate in the ministry and share the glory of this miracle, when in reality, Jesus could ask any in the crowd to do the same job.

Most activities in the life of a church are ordinary and essential. But there will come a time when God gives us extraordinary opportunities for faith and action. There will come a time when we can choose between small reasonable and achievable goals, and audacious goals that are beyond reason and seem unachievable, goals that cannot succeed unless God makes it work. How then will we choose? How then will we act?

While regular spiritual leadership operates by the ordinary methods of consensus building, extraordinary work of God is not by democratic vote but by calling. Ten spies said, "Don't go into the Promised Land." They were sensible. Two spies said, "It's going to be tough, but the LORD will lead us to victory." The majority won the vote, but the nation lost thirty-eight years in the wilderness.

Doing the extraordinary beyond our reasonable ability is always an act of faith executed in fear and trembling. No one is brash about such an act of faith. But no one should let fear rather than faith rule the day.

As a church, I believe Shalom will be called to do extraordinary things for God. I don't know what these will be. But these are opportunities God gives to every church. Only a few have the faith to put everything on the line and receive God's blessings. Some will act like the disciples, just helping out and staying around for the show. Some may even oppose God's gift to us to do the extraordinary.

We are all eager to grow and progress as individuals and as a church. God may choose to grow us through ordinary means or extraordinary action. Should he call us to do the extraordinary will we seize the opportunity?

The ordinary in our Christian life is essential. It is like the ordinary food and exercise we need. We are strengthened through the ordinary, to do both the ordinary and the extraordinary. The extraordinary is exciting, scary, and fun. While the ordinary shows God's provision and goodness, it is usually in the extraordinary that we see the power of God prominently displayed; when we experience God's power beyond our abilities.

Let us enjoy the ordinary and prepare for the extraordinary. When God gives us an opportunity to do the extraordinary for him, let us seize the day.

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Rev. Peter Eng is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.