

Beyond Human Scope

“I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away. And his disciples answered him, “How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?” (Mark 8:2-4, ESV)

The disciples were dead-on, weren't they? How can anyone feed (like in this instance) 4,000 men plus women and children in a desolate place with virtually no food accessible?

How often have I rushed reading through this passage and just ticked it off as, “Yeah, just one of those miracles”, and moved on without pausing for a moment to review its relevance to life today? The disciples asked a fundamental question here, a question that's so topical even today, every day, in uncountable places all over the globe. How do we feed the starving multitudes in our reach with no access to (sufficient) food resources?

Well, we make a plan, don't we? We create relief and aid organizations or aid funds to secure special taxation treatment, thus luring people on fund raising tours into giving, appealing to their heart and compassion, spend their donations on food, its transportation, distribution logistics and administration, and try to make sure that the aid is reaching the poor and needy in time without too much siphoned off by corrupt officials and authorities. I'm sure I left a few steps out of the support chain man usually sets in motion to make relief efforts happen, but never mind. Not at all do I want to dismiss the well meant and honest endeavors of man helping those in need, even if the way I put this sounds a bit snotty.

It just struck me that Jesus' reaction to this apparent need of feeding a multitude was so different to our normal response. No accusation of lacking foresight, no labeling the people to be irresponsible. He didn't instruct His disciples, “Work something out, guys. Use your brains and make a plan. You're intelligent people, so find a solution. But quickly!” Nothing of that sort. Unlike elsewhere, where Jesus advised us to calculate the cost before going into any kind of enterprise (Luke 14), He didn't even ask His disciples to swiftly work out what was needed to deal with this immediate mammoth challenge.

Instead, Jesus asked them what was available for the task at hand at that very moment!

Have we ever considered that at times the Lord might just be interested in our willingness to make available what we have (!) so that He (not us) can multiply it miraculously into what is needed, rather than expecting us to come up with a fully thought-through and well-worked-out solution? Does it occur to us that, rather than looking at what we don't have and concentrating at what we think we need, we could be more effective for the Lord by offering what we have with a grateful and generous heart?

Granted, seeing a miraculous multiplication as a general solution for such occasions would perhaps be too far-fetched. However, instead of becoming frustrated, disheartened and paralyzed when coming to the end of our own wits in challenging times like that, wouldn't it be worthwhile taking such an approach into account also? That, of course, would require faith and belief in God's ability and willingness to do what is beyond our human scope. Remember? Not only was the multitude fed sufficiently, they even collected more food-leftovers than were “invested” in the startup of this feeding program!

Are we willing and prepared to cooperate with the Lord beyond our human scope?