“Then taking the seven loaves he gave thanks, broke them, and gave them to his disciples to distribute, and they distributed them to the crowd.”

Jesus taught in many ways, and one of them was through the use of signs. Too often when we think of a miracle, we think of something that is simply amazing, which is what the word “miracle” means, but then we pass on without looking at: What does the miracle actually say? It actually does speak.

Now what is this sign or miracle saying to us? What is it referring to? It’s talking about the experience we all have from time to time of being completely empty and drained of all our own provisions. In this particular setting the people were with Jesus three days. Now, of course, they didn’t leave home without something to eat, but whatever they had is gone! So Jesus says, “Well, I don’t really want to send these people home. They won’t get there. So what do you have to eat?” And they say, “Well, we still have seven loaves.” Now seven loaves are nothing for such a great crowd of people. And very often we feel that we don’t have enough for what we need for our future, for our families. But the point is, whatever we have, if we give it to God, it is enough. It’s more than enough. It’s an abundance.

It isn’t that we don’t have to contribute something. Jesus does not fabricate bread out of the air, and Jesus does not turn stones into bread! He was tempted to, if you recall. The devil said, “Well, if you are hungry, turn these stones into bread.” No, that’s not the way God works. That is not a true miracle. God really requires something of us. We have to contribute something—here seven loaves and a couple fish. Then he takes that gift and he multiplies it so that it’s abundant food for everyone.

That is true in our own lives today. This is meant to be a paradigm. It’s meant to be something we live by, not just a nice story, that, oh, isn’t that interesting; isn’t that marvelous! No, it’s the way we are supposed to live. We experience the end of our
tethers. That’s natural. We experience the limits of our energy. That’s natural. **But the limits of our tether and the limits of our energy are not the end of the story. We are children of God.** We are not in this world by ourselves, and we are never alone. We have the help of God for the asking.

But we don’t ask and wait. We ask and run. **We don’t realize how much waiting and silence and listening is part of true prayer.** We don’t have time for that. We ask God questions all right! Then when we hear nothing, we say, “Well, if you are not going to respond, I have to hang up because this is long distance. And besides, I’m busy. My time is valuable!” Well, it’s not that valuable! What are much more valuable are the **gifts of God**, and they don’t come instantaneously. They **come according to God’s own timetable.** **No one has ever grown in holiness without waiting.** No one has ever grown in holiness without learning how to deal with silence—no one! No one has ever grown in holiness without listening, and learning how to listen, because **God doesn’t speak to everyone in the same way.** Some people, I believe, he actually carries on a conversation with, others he does not. But he speaks to all of us—sometimes through others. So **listening is not just listening in the silence. It’s also listening to people we meet,** and we are not very good at it! And we are not very good at waiting! That’s why we often don’t experience the healing and the feeding and the filling that we need. But it’s not the lack of God’s love. It’s the lack of our time. We don’t give it! We don’t give our little barley loaves of time. We don’t give our barley loaves of effort and our little fish to God in faith. So this is a lesson given to us to help us live and enjoy abundance.