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Holbrook, Arizona  
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**TEXT: 6: 1-21**

Despite an inordinately busy schedule this week, I had a sermon prepared for this morning—and it was a goodie! I'd planned this clever homily wherein I'd bring leftovers from my refrigerator and compare them to people—some of us like a soda that's been left uncapped too long, we're flat. Some of us in sour cream containers—when we're really not sour cream but leftover broccoli. False advertising. Some of us like in transparent containers—we are what you see—and some of us in containers that non-transparent containers. You don't know what you're getting until you open it up and look inside—and even then you're not sure what that is! Yes, it was a terribly clever sermon but when I woke up this morning, the Holy Spirit directed me to just talk with you otherwise. It's almost as if He said, "Jeff, there are going to be people in church this morning who need to hear something else." And so let's talk about something else.

I want to talk with you this morning about how I felt when I was growing up and at school. Whether it was in gym class or recess, a game was being formed—basketball, dodgeball. Two captains stepped forward and each of them would start choosing teammates, first one calling out a name and then the other. You know what I'm talking about, don't you? I was in that pool of the unchosen—and desperately hoping not to be the last one picked. But quite frequently I was. I was the leftover. Nobody wanted me on their team because, you see, I wasn't terribly athletic. In fact, I was pretty lousy as an athlete. I didn't want to be a leftover. "Pick me, pick me," I'd secretly wish. But I usually wasn't, until a reluctant captain, ended up stuck with me.

I showed the movie, "While You Were Sleeping" at the Mission recently. It's not a Christian movie and were Cherise to find out I was showing this secular video in chapel, she might question my judgment—but I think there's a lot of good theology in that movie. Sandra Bullock is the star and she plays the role of Lucy, a family-less woman, working as a ticket-taker for the Chicago subway system. It's approaching Christmas and, because she has no family, she's asked

to work Christmas. She seems these happy families going shopping or to family get-togethers—and she’s sad. She wants that desperately—but nobody wants her. She feels left out—a leftover.

Some of you want to be married. You want a partner with whom you can share your life. You dream of talking together, eating together, doing dishes together, laughing together—but that hasn’t happened for you. Or maybe you’ve been married briefly and it hasn’t worked out and you feel all the more leftover. You think, “What’s wrong with me that nobody wants me?” It’s terribly hurtful, not to mention lonely and boring and even frightening.

Last night, at the Mission, I showed one of the Dave Ramsey videos for chapel. I thought, “I’ll bet a lot of these folks struggle with managing the little money they have. I think the *Financial Peace University* videos—at least some of them—would be of benefit from learning God’s way of managing money.” And I think they would but as I was showing that video, I thought, “Maybe this isn’t a good choice.” You see, Dave assumes a certain middle-class American audience. He talks about budgeting and uses as an example a couple with a \$50,000 annual income. Now, I think the principles Dave teaches are good whether one’s managing a \$50,000 annual income or a \$5,000 annual income but still, as I watched this video, I thought: “I hope this isn’t making my Mission friends too badly.” Not everyone, of course, but I think a good many Mission residents already feel left out of mainstream society and I thought that, perhaps, the Ramsey video would make them feel even worse. Cherise Merrick, the Mission’s Director, said in her Summer newsletter: “Disaffiliation is the greatest reason for homelessness. Some who come to the Mission literally have no one to list as next of kin. Most don’t have a friend in the world, or at best, bad friends who use them.” Ouch. Leftovers.

I counsel with various people with various issues. Without revealing any names or situations, I can say that a lot of the people who sit in my office feel left out of society. They struggle with depression, anger, loss, mental illness and spiritual oppression. Despite the fact that they may have people who care about them, they feel at sea—isolated, not sure what direction they’re heading, hopeless and, for many, cut off from God. They feel left out and leftover.

Oh, there are so many ways we feel like leftovers, even the healthiest and more privileged among us. We all, at times, have the sense of being not-a-part-of-the-team—waiting, hoping to be chosen, and not reluctantly last.

Why all this talk about leftovers? In our Gospel reading this morning—and remember, Gospel means good news—Jesus said to His disciples, after the 5,000 had been fed, verse 12: *“Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.”* Let me say that again: *“Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.”* Jesus seems to care about leftovers.

The feeding of the 5,000 was miracle enough, it seems to me. What an amazing phenomenon! Matthew’s account of this story tells us that it was 5,000 men, not counting the women and children—so, including them, the crowd would have been 15,000 at least, maybe closer to 20,000. And all fed with five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus clearly was demonstrating His divinity here in that He was able to accomplish this amazing feat.

But story could have ended with verse 11: *“Then Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks, He distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.”* There could have been an “Amen” there or a “Thanks be to God!” The story could have concluded nicely with verse 14: *“When the people saw the sign that He had done, they began to say, ‘This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.’”* That would have been a satisfying story.

But God, in His goodness, includes verses 12 and 13 for the sake of us leftovers. Listen to it again: *“When they were satisfied, He told His disciples, ‘Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.’ So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets.”*

This is the part of this amazing story that I believe God would have me to share with you this morning: That Jesus cares about the leftovers. That He doesn’t want any of us to be lost, pushed to the side, forgotten about, unchosen. And that there is great potential in us leftovers: There were twelve baskets full of leftovers! And who knows what was done with them.

My dear people, my fellow leftovers, Jesus wants to gather you up. You are not a byproduct of civilization, some extraneous piece of humanity, some useless and unwanted bit of being. You have not been forgotten by Him. It is His will that “*nothing be lost,*” and that includes you and me. Nothing.

I want you to know this morning—not just here (point to head) but here (point to heart)-- that you have not been forgotten by God. I want you to grasp in your core being today that, while you may feel like a leftover and, in truth, may be leftover from society as it swirls around, you are not forgotten by God. He would pick you up and deposit you in a basket with a lot of other leftovers and then, God only knows, use you for whatever purpose He has planned. I’m confident that those twelve baskets full of leftovers weren’t just thrown in the garbage or fed to the pigs. No, Jesus would have some purpose for those leftovers—some good and noble and beautiful purpose. And, my dear leftovers, God has some good and noble and beautiful purpose for you, too. It ain’t over.

I was thinking about the name of this little church recently. No doubt my thoughts along those lines had to do with the memorial service for charter member Elaine Snell yesterday. Reflecting upon Elaine’s life made me think, inevitably, about the beginnings of this congregation because she was there at the beginning—when this congregation was named. Those charter members could have given this church a grander name: Victory Lutheran Church, Church of the Resurrection, King of Kings Lutheran Church. Now those are all good names and certainly appropriate for some congregations but I’m glad those founders of our congregation chose a simpler, more commonplace name for our simpler, more commonplace congregation: Peace Lutheran Church. It seems to me that when life has made us a leftover and yet, instead of feeling badly about that, we can know that we have been chosen by God for some Divine purpose and that He’d not waste anything, we can have peace—the “*peace that passes all understanding.*” (Phil.4:7)

My dear, fellow leftovers: Today’s good news is that you are not a leftover. God has chosen you, values you, has not overlooked you—but indeed, has put you in His Divine basket. It remains to be seen how He’s going to use you but rest assured: He will. Amen.

Songs:

Opening	“Praise The One Who Breaks The Darkness” (ELW#843)
Psalm 145	“All Creatures Of Our God And King”
Message	“No Matter What” (Worship Team)
Closing	“Break Now The Bread Of Life” (ELW#515)