PASTOR THOMPSON

By seven o’clock, everyone’s out of their beds and into the kitchen, ten little hands grabbin’ for the pop tarts and orange juice:
Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and
Gracie, the youngest, head full of dark curls.
Why are you cryin’? I ask her.
Cause they took all the strawberry! she whines, plum tears rollin’ down her cheeks.
I don’t even have to ask:
Luke, the little devil, is holdin’ a pop tart in each hand, alternatin’ bites left and right, right and left, like he’s just come out of the famine of Egypt.
Luke, I say, do you think it’s fair for you to have two strawberry pop tarts and your sister to have none?
He looks to his right hand, then his left, considering…
What would Jesus do, Luke?
He doesn’t even blink: Turn ’em into five thousand!
Then he stuffs the remainin’ pastry in his mouth so his cheeks bulge like a blowfish.
Gracie bursts into fresh it’s-the-end-of-the-world-as-I-know-it-sobs, and just as I’m tempted to curse the Lord for takin’ away Miriam so soon,
Haddie arrives in the nick of time, pluckin’ Gracie up in her arms and whisperin’ soft ministrations in her ear.
The boys are runnin’ sprints round the table when the phone rings.
I mouth the words to Haddie as I pick up the receiver: only forty-seven days to go.
She nods lookin’ longingly in the distance for that promised land:
August twenty-first when school starts again.
Can I get an amen?

Hello?
It’s the church treasurer, Gene Holder, he says there’s a discrepancy in the books.
Six hundred and seventy dollars missin’ from last week’s collection.
I tell him it went to fix the air conditioning in the youth hall, God forgive me, and that seems to appease him.
But I can never get off the phone with Gene without gettin’ an earful on financial stewardship, how Pastor Brinkley never let the church run in the red.
He won’t let me off the phone this mornin’ till I promise to preach on the importance of tithing real soon, even insists on speakin’ to the congregation himself:
‘cause I’ve been faithful in my tithe since 1939.
Thank you, Gene, I tell him, you’re a fine example to us all.
And you know what, he is.