

“More Than Enough”
August 15, 2021

II Kings 4:42-44
John 6:1-15

It’s always a danger to preach outside.

It’s always a danger because we are so easily distracted.

The early Congregationalists knew the importance of “hearing the Word of God” and did all that they could to avoid anything that would distract our listening.

Clergy were robed in black—so that they would not take attention away from what was being said. Colonial New England meetinghouses had—and still have—clear glass windows, again, so that the scenes in stained glass and the play of light would not distract from the Word being read and proclaimed. And while we have stained glass that lets beautiful light in down on the corner of Jefferson and Clinton, it keeps us from looking outside during worship.

The outdoors, after all, are filled with the distracting dangers of the beauty of the earth and sky and trees and plants.

Many years ago, I was preaching at an outdoor service when a flock of geese flew overhead. I probably should have ended the sermon right then.

Everyone was watching instead of listening.

It's always a danger to preach outside.

Outside, however, is where the Gospel takes us this morning.

Look at the lakeshore, where Jesus is feeding five thousand. We hear a story about the abundance that God creates and offers to us.

Something different is going on there.

Scarcity gives way to abundance.

Out of next to nothing come leftovers!

And we are invited to participate in all of this.

There on the shoreline, Jesus is teaching and healing. The crowd of people begins to swell. And finally, the question is asked: "Where are we going to get enough bread to feed all these people?"

The question comes from Jesus—but it could just as easily have been asked by a disciple or by one of us.

Where will we get enough?

Philip is anxious. He's a realist. He faces what he regards as the facts. But the result of his hard-nosed approach sounds mostly like whining: "Six months' wages isn't going to be enough." What are we going to do?

It's easy to lament over what doesn't seem to be there: the lack of resources, the shortage of volunteers. It's far easier, really, to criticize than to go out and find the child with the five loaves and two fish.

The question of Jesus: “Where will we get bread . . .?” is asked out of a sense that the resources are available, if people would just look a little—or look a lot if necessary.

Philip isn’t quite sure what to do.

Someone was there who could help, however.

It wasn’t an adult who was rich or powerful. It wasn’t someone who could provide money or just tell the people to go home. It wasn’t an adult who knew all about crowd control or food service. It wasn’t an adult at all.

It was a child—a child who, like most children, didn’t seem to have very much. What were five barley loaves and two fish in the face of this crowd?

This child was willing to share, however, and gave the bread and fish to Jesus.

And Jesus takes what is offered and gives thanks to God.

There’s something here about the way that God works in our lives, in our world.

Jesus doesn’t show up with a basket of food, ready to feed the people himself. Instead, he calls those who walk with him to set aside the myth of scarcity and gather the resources that are all about us. We encounter a Christ who challenges us to make the most of what we have and who we are—not

just to feed the hungry (although we might do that) but to live our lives to the fullest.

The faithful response to the challenges we face is not to sit on our hands waiting for God to do something. The faithful response is to gather the available resources, perhaps, in the process discovering things we never imaged would be there.

How does the faithful heart respond to such abundance? With thanksgiving.

Listen as Jesus says: “Make the people sit down.”

Look as he takes the bread and the fish. Five loaves. And only two fish.

It isn't enough.

It can't be enough.

Listen again. Listen as Jesus gives thanks for what *is* there—which is more than we often do.

Maybe he uses the common ancient blessing that reminds those present of God's care for the Hebrew people on their Exodus journey from Egypt, of God's generosity. “Blessed are you, O God, Ruler of the universe, who makes bread to fall from heaven.” He gives thanks, breaks the bread and gives it to the people.

We don't know how what happened happened.

But the next thing we see, they're collecting leftovers—twelve baskets full!

You figure it out.

Miracles trouble a lot of people. They trouble me. “Miracle” is what is unusual and seems to be contrary to the nature of things. And yet it might be that these “unusual things” are simply contrary to our limited knowledge of the course of nature.

Reflecting on this story some very liberal, very reputable theologians have said that the miracle that took place was a supernatural multiplication of the loaves and the fish. In this way Jesus showed his power—God’s power—even over material objects. Like I say, that kind of talk makes me a little uneasy—but maybe that’s because I don’t want to admit my own limited knowledge of the course of nature.

Others suggest that the real miracle occurred not in the bread and the fish, but in the hearts of the people. Because of the sharing of one child, because Jesus took that gift for what it was, others joined in the act of sharing.

Perhaps one who earlier was complaining of hunger, on seeing Jesus and the child, turned to a neighbor and said: “Well, you know, I do have a piece of bread with me as well. Here, there’s enough for the two of us, really.”

And so on and so on. Hearts were opened, hands were opened.

The loaves were multiplied.

That's a more "natural" accounting of this "miracle." But that explanation makes me a little uncomfortable too, because I want to think that God is capable of even greater things than people being kind to one another—as miraculous as that often is.

Whatever the miracle, it *was* a miracle because it pointed to something beyond that event. The Gospel of John calls it a "sign." Indeed, it points to, it is a sign of God's loving feeding of the whole world.

It is a sign that God provides for us.

It is a sign that we are partners with God. After all, none of this could have happened if it were not for a child who was able to say to Jesus: "Here, take what I have. Use it."

To be a Christian is to be fed by Christ, the living bread, and to share bread with others.

Until we let God feed us—with forgiveness, with love, with bread—we will have nothing.

If we only let God feed *us*—and do not offer the same food to others—we become bloated and unable to act.

Friends, the generosity of God is without measure. It works in your life and mine in a thousand different ways, seen and unseen. We are given what we need—and so much more.

But I think we knew this all along. We knew all along that our Christian faith and commitment have called us to share with abundance the life that God has given in abundance, to feed as we have been fed.

We knew it all along.

May God continue to give us all that is needed. And may we continue as partners with God, sharing the bread of life that we have received.