

John 6: 1-15
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Enough

Rev. Dr. Frederick Lewis
The Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill

Well, we are now well into the season for weddings. The month of May kicks it off and by June it's in full swing. Now at mid-summer, we are enjoying all those lovely photos of recently wedded couples popping up on our Facebook pages and Instagram. Over the course of my ministerial life, I've had the privilege of officiating at dozens and dozens of weddings. One of my first happened in the back yard of a church member whose niece was being married. It was a blustery day and just as the service was about to begin, a tremendous gust of wind came along and swept the wooden arbor stationed behind me right off the ground. Then came the thunder and the lightning and we all ran for cover. Then came the rain and the hail. All very uninvited wedding guests!

Weddings are generally wonderful occasions. Filled with joy and possibility. Yet, to be honest, most often as the couple stands there before "*God and these witnesses*" and make their vows "For richer and for poorer, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, as long as we both shall live." There is this unspoken, yet underlying sense that perhaps these friends are making impossible commitments. The question arises. Will there be, can there be enough wisdom, enough strength, enough forgiveness, enough love to see them through all that lies ahead?

The story of the feeding of the five thousand is the ONLY miracle Jesus performed that is recorded in all four gospels. You will find it in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each writer includes it in their account. Apparently, this story was just too important for any one of the Gospel writers to leave it out, too important in the life of Jesus, too important for the life of the church. John places the story near the time of the Passover, connecting it to the Exodus when God delivered the Hebrews from bondage and later satisfied their hunger in the desert by providing for them "mana" from heaven. It was truly a life sustaining gift that not only filled their stomachs but also taught them an important lesson about God's faithfulness.

Fast forward now to John's Gospel as Jesus transitions from Jerusalem where he has encountered deep conflict with the religious leaders. What got him into "good trouble" there as the late Congressman John Lewis called it was Jesus' dramatically different views regarding healing on the Sabbath and his unashamed connection with God whom he called "Abba" or "Father" These conflicts recede now as Jesus journeys to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which for John's readers would be known as the Sea of Tiberius, no small reminder of other earthly rulers and kingdoms. Now Jesus faces a different kind of problem. Throngs of people are following him because they want to see more of his miraculous healing power.

Here in this setting, Jesus surveys the crowd, lifts his eyes as from prayer, and speaks with his disciples. Not unlike any good rabbi, he asks a test question (*for which I would not be raising my hand*) but seeing the crowd before him Jesus turns to Philip and asks, "How are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" Apparently, Jesus sees more than just a crowd, he sees people, but even more than that Jesus sees their physical need. He sees that these people are hungry!

You can say what you want about the Christian faith. But our faith never separates heaven and earth, the spiritual and the material, the sacred from our everyday lives. Our faith is always incarnational. "The Word became flesh" wrote John, "and dwelt among us full of grace and truth." In other words, the Christian faith is an embodied faith where beliefs and convictions take on meaning as we live our lives breaking bread, pouring wine, serving meals, holding the hand of another, reading a story to children, arranging flowers for the altar, participating on a mission trip, serving on a search committee, creating music, living together in community, encountering God in one another.

Jesus saw the people, but he also saw their need. So did Philip who looked at the need before him and made the quick calculation that more than six months of wages would be necessary to buy bread for everyone just to have a taste. Andrew, too, has been out among the people, taking inventory of their resources. Yet, the only food he uncovers is

presently held in the hands of a young boy who has five barely loaves and two dried fish. Andrew then asks his question, "What are they among so many?"

We understand. It's not an unfamiliar question. And it is a legitimate one as well. In a world full of pain and sadness, we wonder, will there, can there be enough compassion? In a world so deeply divided, can there be enough grace and mutual understanding to heal the world's estrangement? In a world of deep prejudice and unrelenting injustice, can there be enough wisdom to redress our cultural challenges? Can there be enough hope to restore the world's despair? Enough love to conquer hate? Are there enough resources for us to do what we need to do, what God is calling us to do? And what is it that God is really calling us to do?

Having heard their questions, Jesus turns to his disciples and asks them to seat the people down on the grass and then, he takes the young boy's offering, blesses it, and Jesus distributes it to the crowds and the text is very clear. Jesus satisfies the hunger of every person. There is enough. In fact, there are twelve baskets leftover. Now what on earth, do you think God's Spirit might be trying to say to a congregation through this text this morning?

You know the saying, there are two kinds of people? There are those who believe there are two kinds of people and then there are those who don't. Well, yes, but there are those who look at what is placed before them and what they see is more than enough and then there are those who look and what they see is very little. There are those who see abundance and there are those who see scarcity. There are those who trust that there is enough and then those who just see five crusty pieces of bread and some dried-out fish.

I learned this firsthand when I was in seminary and the church I was serving as a "student minister" was conducting a capital funds campaign to build a new church building. Naturally, there was a lot of excitement about the project. Plans were developed. An architect's rendering of the proposed new building was placed in the church lobby. The capital campaign began. But at the end of the day, the pledges received were not sufficient to cover the cost of construction. The whole thing might have ended right there. But the congregation decided they would help the contractor build the building by providing much of the labor for the project.

Over the course of the next two years, church members armed with hammers and saws, helped to pour foundations, build walls, paint ceilings and lay carpet every weekend. I will admit some did demonstrate some rather unconventional building practices but, in the end, the project was completed. On the Saturday before the Sunday when the new building was to be occupied, they transported the oak pews from the old sanctuary and placed them in the new sanctuary. They were tired but it was the best kind of tired I had ever seen.

I decided to stay with that congregation for several more years because I WAS making \$25 a week. I might have been over-paid! No, I decided to stay with these friends because I thought they could teach their student pastor something about what it means to be a people of faith and they could teach me something about God and what God can do with people who somehow believe there is enough!

I know what you want to ask. How did Jesus do it? How did Jesus multiply the loaves and fish to feed everyone with enough left over to fill twelve baskets? Well, for this, I turn to the brilliant exegesis of our former interim pastor, Dr. Craig Barnes who said of such things, "I don't know. I didn't write this stuff!"

Now that doesn't explain much nor should it. What we are dealing with here is a matter of faith and as such it is something ultimately beyond our ability to fully explain or control put under a microscope use to our own advantage, display on a church signor market for church growth! There is something else at work here, something that satisfies you for more than a day.

What is striking about John's account of this story is unlike Matthew and Mark and Luke who have the disciples themselves distribute the meal (always a good sermon about everyone pitching in and doing their part) in John's Gospel it is Jesus himself distributes the bread and the fish. In John's Gospel, Jesus is the one who uniquely reveals the character and purposes of God. It's no small detail. In the very first chapter, we hear about Jesus as the Word from whose fullness

have all received grace upon grace. Then, at a wedding in Cana of Galilee, its Jesus who tells the servants to fill some jars with water, and they fill them to the brim. And the water is transformed into wine, not just good wine, but the best, a seemingly endless supply. Then, at a well in Samaria, Jesus tells a woman about living water gushing up to eternal life. Before he departs from his disciples, in the 14th chapter of John, we hear Jesus say, "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places." Over and over, there is this note of fullness and abundance. Apparently, it does not matter to God whether its wine for a wedding or bread for those who hungry or rooms for eternity. There is enough.

You know the real question is not how this miracle happened but rather how is it that in this Jesus we find someone who through his words and deeds reveal the kind of love and mercy and healing and hope and justice God intends for us and all creation. It is enough. In fact, more than enough that the God revealed in Jesus would go so far as to literally die to save us and then by God's power is raised to take away the sting of death, the Incarnate One who meets us always on far side of despair, enables us to live with faith even with our doubts, and even when it seems most unlikely enables a community of faith to embody something of the very breadth and length and height and depth of the love of God?

Michael Lindvall tells the story of Reverend Fred Bahnan an Arab born pastor who forty years ago shepherded a small church in Muslem held West Beirut. In 1983 the armies of Israel marched into Lebanon. Anticipating the armies would lay siege to Beirut, Bahnan's congregation purchased and stockpiled large amounts of food. The siege came. West Beirut was totally cut off. Little food was allowed in, somewhat like Gaza today. The Sesson of the church made arrangements for distributing the food they had stockpiled. They all assumed that they would share the food with members of their own congregation, and if there was enough, with other Christians in Beirut, and then if there was any leftover with Muslims in the city. But then, a much -respected elder- a woman stood before them and said, "If we do not demonstrate the love of Christ in this moment, who will?" After she spoke there was a lengthy discussion, but they finally decided on the action they would take. They decided they would first share their food with their Muslim neighbors. And then, if there was enough, they would share it with other Christians in Beirut. Then, if there was any leftover, they would distribute it to the members of the congregation. And in the end, there was enough. There always is.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.