

Matthew 14:14-21 (New Revised Standard Version)

When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

In a tiny and isolated fishing village along the North Carolina coast  
a small group of life-long Presbyterians ran an ad in the paper  
inviting any other Presbyterians in the area to meet with them,  
**because there weren't any Presbyterian churches nearby.**

They decided to clean up a one-room, old and abandoned chapel,  
where they began to hold worship services and church meetings.  
When they could, they would get a military chaplain  
or a retired minister to preach and lead worship.

Obviously there weren't enough of them nor sufficient resources  
to pay for a regular pastor or to build their own church building,  
but that was the hope they talked about and prayed about –  
**- to have a Presbyterian Church in their community.**

One Sunday after the worship service,  
a representative from the Presbytery came and met with them,  
who explained and described **all that would be necessary**  
for them to be chartered as a Presbyterian Church and  
receive Presby. support as **a New Church Development.**

It was very informative, and yet also a very discouraging meeting.  
It seemed doubtful that they could fulfill all the requirements  
and ever become a Presbyterian Church with their own pastor.

Hearing their sense of disappointment, despair and hopelessness  
a fairly feisty, older woman named Maggie Price stood up,  
looked around and demanded, "**So where, where is your faith?**"

That question was a challenge that shifted the whole conversation  
toward what they might be able to do together **with what they did have,**  
and a few months later, fresh and right out of seminary  
I was called to become their first full-time pastor,  
and about a year later we celebrated moving into our new building.

**Isn't it truly amazing and incredible and wonderful,  
what God can do and accomplish with even a very little?**

Too often, we focus more on the scarcity than on God's abundance.  
We measure and we calculate the resources we have to work with,  
**and allow that to define our sense of what might be possible,**  
**which is to forgo the possibility that God might be up to something,**  
**which is what's going on with the disciples in the Matthew text,**  
when the disciples declared in, vs. 17,

"We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish."

There was a huge crowd and Jesus had been healing the sick all day.  
They were in a very desolate and isolated wilderness-place,  
and as evening came, the weary disciples reminded Jesus,  
that it's late, so send the people away so they can eat.

Realistically, the disciples were **quite right and being reasonable**.

But then Jesus responds, vs. 16

"They need not go away; you give them something to eat."

In the Greek, the word "you" is repeated for added emphasis.

"You! You give them something to eat" --

indicating that **the solution will flow through the disciples,  
for as it turned out, God was up to something.**

We all know the story, because other than the resurrection of Jesus,  
it is the only miracle that's described in all four Gospels.

We read that Jesus used what little they had, vs. 19-21

Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and **blessed** and **broke** the loaves, and **gave** them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.

And **all ate and were filled**; and they took up **what was left over** of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Also in the Greek, where it says, "Jesus gave to the disciples",  
the verb tense indicates that **Jesus continued to give**.

He kept giving out more pieces to the disciples to give to the crowd,  
which shifts the story away from a perceived scarcity  
to an unending **grace-like flow of abundance from God**.

**The resources that seemed too meager and scarce,  
were more than enough when entrusted to Jesus.**

**Isn't it truly amazing and wonderful and encouraging  
what God can do and accomplish with even so very little?**

Various sceptics have tried to explain away the miraculous aspects.

Some suggesting that perhaps from 5 huge loaves, there was enough  
to give just a tiny bit to each person in a crowd of 5000+,  
and by using really tiny baskets to gather all the crumbs,  
except that the text says, vs. 20, **And all ate and were filled.**

Other skeptics suggest that seeing the meager loaves shared,  
that shamed the other people in the crowd to share their food,  
and so the lesson is about sharing with our neighbors.

**Perhaps an interesting sermon, but not faithful to the text,**  
for surely one of the Gospels would have included that detail.

Such explanations are really just distractions and speculations  
that miss the point, the lesson and importance of this story.

What matters is not **how** the feeding of the crowd was accomplished,  
but two things revealed about the nature of God and our calling.

1<sup>st</sup> that ours is a God of compassion, grace, blessings **and abundance**.

2<sup>nd</sup> that as disciples, as followers of Jesus Christ, he wants to feed his gracious love and abundance out into the world **through us**.

Often we are **quite right** when we look at a task or challenge in life,  
and realistically measure our limitations, our lack of resources  
and recognize that there's not enough to get the job done.

That little group of Presb. worshipping in NC were **quite right**,  
that their resources were not sufficient to build a new church.

The disciples were **quite right**  
in recognizing that 5 loaves could not feed that huge crowd,  
there really wasn't nearly enough – **there was way more than enough...**  
... 12 extra baskets full.

So the question is not, do we have enough to get it done,  
**but what might the Lord accomplish with what we do have?**

The lesson and truth is, God will never give us a task or job to do  
without also providing in abundance and in creative excess  
the means and resources needed to accomplish that task well.

Though sometimes we forget, or doubt or choose to ignore,  
the truth is, God has promised to provide all that is needed  
to accomplish well **whatever it is that God wants us to do.**  
And if you've been a Christian for a while, then surely  
you have lived and experienced that truth along the way.

We see the size of the problem & focus on the resources we're lacking.  
We let our fear and our sense of scarcity **run the calculations**,  
which then overwhelms and limits our faith and trust in God,  
**causing us to be afraid and hesitant and even unwilling**  
**to step out in faith and offer even the small amount we do have.**

Though sometimes even our best efforts and available resources  
can seem insufficient for the task or not enough to really matter,  
**yet that does not mean that we cannot somehow do something,**  
**or that the little we can do does not make a real difference.**

The critical truth revealed in the story about feeding of the 5000  
is that even the smallest of contributions **are significant**,  
when we are attentive & responsive to God's grace & Spirit  
for as it turns out, those small loaves and fish they had  
were all the resources Jesus needed **to build a miracle.**

The message of this story is about what might happen and **can happen**  
when we trust and place ourselves and our lives in the hands of God  
to use and put to work whatever we have and are willing to offer.

I'm reminded of a story that happened stateside during WWII,  
when sugar was scarce and was being tightly rationed,  
and a man at a lunch counter demanded more for his coffee,  
and the waitress replied, "**Just stir what you've already got.**"

**"Just stir what you've already got."**  
Our call is to be faithful with whatever we've already got,  
trusting in the Lord's promised provision of abundance--  
- and assurance of all that is needed to accomplish God's purpose.

That is a critical truth that we need to hear and hold onto ---  
for these are difficult, distressing and troubling times,  
and it's easy to feel overwhelmed by the problems around us.

Today our world, our culture, our community are in great need.

Families are struggling & feelings of hopelessness can overwhelm,  
with depressed and discouraged feelings of devastating dread.

Our world and our culture, they don't do or practice trust, support,  
common kindness, patience, hospitality, mercy or love very well,  
so perhaps here is **God's gift to the Church:**

- **an opportunity** to be countercultural and different than the world,
- **an opportunity** to demonstrate sacrificial welcome and love,  
by allowing God's grace to flow through us to those in need,  
in whatever situation God has chosen to place us to serve.

Our call is **to embrace the present** as the place where God's put us,  
as the place where God intends to work in us and through us,  
and somehow find joy, meaning and purpose in whatever is going on,  
whether this is the place and circumstance of our choosing or not.

We are all blessed by God with some way that we can serve usefully  
to build relationships and deepen our faith by serving together.

**Every one of us can make a real difference to further God's Kingdom,  
by serving as conduits through which the God's grace & love can flow.**

**The Lord's Table points beyond itself toward God's gracious love,  
as a sign of invitation to a joyful, blessed & shared family meal.**

We are here to celebrate God's gifts & blessings, new possibilities,  
and that we are part of something awesome, mysterious and wonderful,

**for God is still very much at work and accomplishing,  
still seeking the lost and transforming wounded lives,  
and even better, inviting us to enjoy and participate,  
by serving as caring dispensers of God's love & grace.**