

World of Abundance

By: Penny Holste

August 3, 2014. Pastor Penny preaches on the feeding of the 5000, from the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus has invited us into his world of abundance.

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We begin this morning in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I wonder if you would rather have more time or more money? Maybe a show of hands? How many would like a little more time? How many would like a little more money? Or both? And the two go together of course. If you have more time, you can probably find a way to get more money. If you have more money, you can find a way to give yourself some more time. But the bottom line is that we usually go through life feeling we don't have enough of something: time, money, whatever. It's kind of what keeps us awake at night wondering, "Am I a good enough parent? Do I have enough friends? Do I look good enough? Have I done well enough at school? Have I done well enough at my work? Is there going to be money at the end of my life? How is my health?" These are the things that we worry about, and it always comes down to this: do I have enough?

And when we worry, we become afraid. And when we become afraid, it is not our best person that is shown forth, because we pull in on ourselves. We don't notice other people and their problems. And if we do, sometimes they even seem to be competitors with us for this small amount of goods that is available to us or not.

I have an idea though, that when you walked through the church doors you wanted to hear about a different world than the world of scarcity and fear. And when you open up your Bibles, and when you open up your hearts in prayer, you're looking for a different reality than a world of scarcity and fear. So this morning let's just push that world, that seems to control us so many times, out of our minds. Let's just push it out.

Because there is a different world, a world we hear described in the Old Testament, when the world was new and everything was good, and God said to Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful and multiply." It was a world of abundance. God told Abraham, "You will have so many descendants you won't be able to count them. They'll be like the stars in the sky." An abundant number of descendants. Or even when the children of Israel were in the wilderness and they were hungry, God sent manna. Everyone got everything they needed. There is another world. It's a world of abundance in which not the bank, and not the health insurance company, but God is in charge.

And it is that world of abundance that broke into the world of fear and scarcity in today's gospel. Because there were people who were afraid and who didn't feel they had much: the crowds that came to hear Jesus. They were by and large poor people. They were there because they, or someone they loved, was sick and they were bringing them to be healed. And they probably had traveled for days, and they were very tired and hungry. And then there are the disciples. They had their own fears. First of all, they were tired because they were all thinking, "Oh good. We have a chance to take a little break here and be off with Jesus by ourselves." And then the crowd shows up. But they were also afraid because just before this event, we're told in Matthew that Jesus' cousin John the Baptist was beheaded by Herod. And then Herod heard about Jesus and thought that Jesus was John brought back to life. So the disciples of course were afraid. Herod would be after Jesus, and them next.

So even with their fear, the disciples could see the need of the crowd. They knew they were hungry. But because they were tired, and because they were fearful, and because they felt they needed more power and they needed so much, this was the disciples' solution. They turned to Jesus and said, "Jesus, send those people to the cities to buy their food." But Jesus turned to them, and I can just imagine he had a smile on his face, and he said, "No. You feed them. You give them food."

You see, what Jesus was asking his followers, his disciples to do, was to push away that world of scarcity and fear and to believe that they had the power of Christ. What he wanted them to do was allow themselves, through his power, to change the world.

Now, this story of Jesus feeding these people — the feeding of the 5000 as we've come to call it — is the only story about Jesus' miracles that is in all four gospels. And people have looked at it and said, "I'm not sure that really Jesus miraculously fed 5000 plus people. Maybe what happened is that people started sharing. And when people started sharing, everyone had enough." But others have said, "No. No, this really happened." And you see, if we're willing to push aside the world of fear and doubt, if we're willing to suspend our doubts, if we're willing to believe that there may be a truth out there that we can't prove in a laboratory, that we might not understand, if we say this is God's world, then I think we too can say, "No, it happened."

And I believe it happened. I believe Jesus fed those people, for two reasons according to the gospel. First, they were hungry and he wanted to help them. But secondly, he wanted to show the disciples that they could participate, they could do a miracle. And this story has been passed down all these years, and is here today I believe, because God wants to tell us the same thing. We, through the power of God, have the power to do God's will, God's miracles.

The miracle of course that we saw Jesus doing was sharing. And so God's telling us the same thing: "You can do it." Now, of course the reason we can is that Jesus has invited us into this world of abundance where we can lose our fears. Jesus says, "You don't have to fear the past — those things that you wish you hadn't done — I've forgiven them. You don't have to fear the future. I'm with you every step of the way. You don't have to fear the end of your life. I've got that covered. I died on the cross to assure that you are in my kingdom." And he says, "What you just simply need to do is feed my people."

And of course what we have, and I've often worried that we don't have enough of, is money and time. After the church service today, we're all invited to join the people of Emmanuel Episcopal and go down to a homeless shelter where there are mostly women and children — Gateway 180 — and we're just going to spend some time. We're not doing much for them. We're going to bring some pizza, play games with the kids, just talk a little bit with the moms. But you know what that does. We all have felt a healing power from being given time by someone. If you can't do that, you know of many people in your lives who either need money or time, and I know our first thought is, "But I've barely got enough for myself!" But this is God's world.

And I imagine you've had the same experience I have, when you start the day and you try to prioritize, try to think, "What would God want me to do today?" It works out. Somehow there is the time. And even if you're really tired at the end of the day, it's a good kind of tired. Because this is God's world. It's a world of abundance. So in this world, Jesus looks at us and says, "Feed my people." And in this world of abundance, knowing of God's promises and love, we have the courage to look at Jesus and smile and say, "We can and we will."

Amen.

*** Keywords ***

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