

“More Than Enough” – Andy Wing, 7.26.09

⁶After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ²A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” ⁶He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷Philip answered him, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” ⁸One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ⁹“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” ¹⁰Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. ¹¹Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹²When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” ¹³So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. ¹⁴When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.”

I read a story about a woman who grew up on a farm during the Great Depression. She remembered that her mother always set the table with an extra plate, in case someone who was hungry would appear, which happened on a fairly regular basis. No one would have blamed this mother if her main concern was having enough food to feed her own family. But her greater concern was making

sure she was prepared to offer someone suffering greater hunger something to eat, no matter how meager.

Like this woman, Jesus' compassion for the needs of the people in front of him wins out over the fear of not having enough. Jesus finds himself in the presence of people who physically needed something to eat, and he gives them food. But this is more than just another miracle story. Jesus also uses the miracle to teach the disciples a lesson about God's generosity. Have you ever thought of how fear can keep us from being as generous as we can be? Jesus teaches the disciples that God's generosity is fearless. Though the disciples are afraid there won't be enough, Jesus shows them that God can give what they need and so much more. After all were fed, there were leftovers!

When I was in college, my friend's family went through some stressful times. Her dad was going through tremendous struggles with unemployment, and her family almost became homeless. They found out that they had two weeks to come up with enough money for their bills or they would lose their house. Then something wonderful happened. My friend's dad was hired on a Friday and started working that Monday in Birmingham. He got paid three times what he was making at his menial job. AND he got a check at the end of that first week. The entire paycheck was enough to cover 2 months worth of house payments—just what

they needed to stay in the house. After that first paycheck was used to make this payment, her parents had exactly \$1.00 leftover. God did it. He provided and even gave them that small bit of extra to demonstrate his miraculous power.

When we meet people from other countries, we realize how very lucky we are; that we have so much more than we need. When I heard Shane Claibourn speak last year, he told of working in a clinic in India. One day they were out of all medicines. All they had left was a bottle of Pepto Bismol. People were lined up down the road waiting to get in, with many different ailments. Each patient got the same treatment: a prayer and some Pepto, and that day, Shane and the other workers witnessed miracle after miracle as people began to get better. What if we were so aware of our dependence on God as these people?

One of the effects of going to another country is that we are reminded of how much we have been given. I am a fan of short term mission trips for this reason. I have had the opportunity to go to the Bahamas, Jamaica, and Mexico. On these trips, I have gotten to meet people who are poor and worship with them. I have worshiped with poor people in homeless shelters. Without fail I always meet someone who doesn't even seem to know they are poor. They talk about how God has given them all they have. God gets the credit. It always changes my

heart, softens me to hear that. I don't know why it is that way, why the poorest people seem to also be the most grateful.

Like these stories tell us, we are completely dependent on God. We cannot take any part of life for granted; our lives are completely in God's hands. The honest truth is that all that we have is given to us by God. And what Jesus does, is to tell us to look beyond our needs so that our attention is squarely focused on the provider for our needs, God the father, the giver of all things, our creator. God's generosity is an open invitation for us to be generous. God has asked that we tithe, but as a preacher pointed out in a sermon I heard one time, God asks that when we give, we give willingly or it's not a gift. It's not generosity if we feel we are giving under compulsion. God asks us to give with a joyful heart. And we do give with a joyful heart when we realize that we are giving back to God because God has given us more than we need!

Right now our economy looks quite bleak. I bet there isn't a single person who hasn't been negatively affected in some way by this recession. Of course the economy has natural cycles, but we have now been in a period of recession for nearly 20 months – far longer than most recessions last. Let's face it – that is really scary. Everyone is cutting back, tightening belts, and making difficult decisions. We want to throw everything we have under a mattress and sit on it

until things start looking up. But when we let our fear control our generosity, we risk missing the miracle of God's provision. What if that young boy, seeing the crowd growing hungry around him, quietly slipped off before anyone could discover his own small meal? His mother had probably packed all that she could afford; if he gave away this meal, he would probably have to go hungry until the next one. What if this young boy had kept quiet, knowing he hardly had enough to feed himself?

It is easy for us to let our fear guide our giving. It is easy for this to happen in our church, too. Each year this congregation approves a budget to fund our operating costs and our missions. Unfortunately our income is falling short of meeting our expenses. What if we decided to hold back money that we had budgeted for missions, just until we caught up a little bit? What if we decided to hold back money from the Presbytery and General Assembly, just until the economy gets a little better, or until we bring in some new members, or until giving goes up? Just to be clear, we are NOT doing that, but it is hard not to let fear dominate our financial course, especially when we just don't see how it is possible to make all of the ends meet.

Our giving and spending should be driven by the mission that God is calling us to, not by a fear that we won't have enough. God has given us so much –

money, time, and talents – and God invites us to show our gratitude by joyfully returning to God a portion of our blessing. Like the loaves and fish, God is just waiting to bless our offerings and multiply them to minister to the many needs of a hungry world. We could hold on to what we have, and put away any surplus for a rainy day, but then we rob ourselves of the opportunity to see God work miracles through our meager loaves and fish.

These are certainly tough times. Some of us are facing some serious financial or physical needs right now. But remember that Jesus fed 5000 people from one little boy's gift. There are times when we find ourselves without anything to give, when we are one of the 4,999 people who are called to receive God's care and provision. I have known of people who have stopped coming to church while they are unable to give money. But we should follow the example of the crowd that came to see Jesus. They left their homes and traveled on foot to see Jesus, not knowing where their next meal would come from. But they went and they followed and they stayed close to Jesus, and they witnessed a miracle! They were fed and blessed just for showing up.

But many of us are like the little boy. Maybe we have a small surplus from which we could give. We might not even recognize it as surplus. The boy didn't bring extra food – he brought just enough for his own dinner! But he didn't hold

anything back. He just brought what he had and laid it before Jesus. What is God calling us to bring? We need to pray about that as individuals and as a church to discern what we are being called to give of our time, talents, and money. The amazing thing is that God has already given what is needed for the ministry to which God has called us. Our task now is to discern what we are being called to give back to God, and to let go of the fear that causes us to hold back the reserve.

When we are following Jesus, we open ourselves to the wonderful gift of being used by God to help others. Just like the little boy, with five small loaves of bread and two small fish, just by following Jesus, by staying as close we can, we open ourselves to be givers and receivers of God's abundant generosity. Even our generosity itself comes from God. Let us be open to share from what we have, because God will give us more than enough.