

*Grace to you and peace from God, our Creator, and from our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

The story of Jesus feeding of the crowd is the only miracle story that appears in all four Gospels in some form. Some of the details are different, but overall, the event is the same: a crowd of people follows Jesus to a place where there's typically no food; Jesus blesses the little bit of food that's available; everyone eats and is satisfied, and there are *a lot* of leftovers. What else is there to say, but that it's a miracle – pure and simple?

But what's different about the story in this Gospel is that, for John, *this* event is the Lord's Supper – the meal that we celebrate when we receive Holy Communion. In the other Gospels, that took place on the night that Jesus was handed over to be crucified, at the end of his life.

But in *this* gospel, the Lord's Supper takes place in the middle of Jesus' life, and he's hosting an event of abundance.

It happens during the second of the three Passover festivals that John mentions. And for this one, Jesus stayed in Galilee instead of going up to Jerusalem, so it's a different setting.

He had just finished healing someone, and then had what was probably an animated conversation with the Temple leaders about who he was and his authority to do what he was doing. And our reading today picks up after that conversation.

At this point in Jesus' life, people knew who he was. A crowd showed up wherever he went. And they did that *because of* what he had been doing for the sick. Not because of who he was as the Son of God.

That's confirmed for us in the last verse when they try to take Jesus by force to make him king.

We are told that five thousand people sat down to be fed that day. Most likely, it was five thousand men. And even more likely is that they weren't there by themselves – their families were with them. So, it's safe to say that it was more like five thousand families that sat down.

Which makes what happened next all the more wondrous.

When Jesus asked Philip where they might buy bread for the crowd, he answers with a very logical, human response: “Six months’ wages wouldn’t be enough...” But Andrew sees some possibility in even just a couple pieces of fish and some small loaves of cheap bread.

And Jesus took that little bit of food, gave thanks, and gave it to the people – as much as they wanted. And only after the people had eaten their fill did Jesus tell the disciples to gather up the leftovers.

John doesn’t tell us what was done with the twelve baskets, but it wasn’t enough that Jesus *fed* the people that day. The feeding *and* the gathering of leftovers visibly showed that with Jesus, “not enough” is never the answer. *Abundance* is. And only Jesus can provide that.

I’ve talked about this before, and you’ve all heard it from your own sources, but the rhetoric in our nation doesn’t encourage a mindset of abundance. It’s the opposite.

We’re constantly being told that we aren’t enough. That we have to *do* more, and *be* more, and *produce* more, and *have* more. And there’s never an end in sight.

Together with that, we’re also constantly being told that the reason we don’t have enough is because people like immigrants, and people who are trans\*, and others are taking, and taking, and taking.

It’s designed to promote fear – not just the fear that we aren’t enough or don’t have enough, but the fear of other people in such a way that it deeply divides us and works to keep it that way. And the voices behind this rhetoric are loud and relentless.

And as followers of Jesus, we are left wondering how we live within this ideology because it *goes against* the teachings of Jesus. How do we act from a posture of abundance? How do we hold onto the courage to say, “I don’t have much to give or to offer, but I do have this” – and then trust that Jesus will make it be enough?

Everything I have been reading and listening to and learning about regarding the answers to those questions is community, community, community. Building community with the people around you. Learning who your neighbors are, beyond their names, so that you can build authentic relationships with them.

And then together, with the help of Jesus, create that place – that life – of abundance.

About a year ago, I attended a training on nonviolent resistance for protest rallies. Along with teaching us what to do and what not to do, the instructor allowed a lot of time for questions, answers, and comments.

Among the participants were parents of young children. They were able to be there because childcare was provided, and that doesn't usually happen, so they were profoundly grateful.

As they spoke, they pointed out that being visible and waving signs isn't the only way to speak out. A lot of people aren't able to do that, and some just want to help in different ways.

The parents that day reminded us that helping behind the scenes *for anything* is just as important. In this case, doing things like providing childcare for people who can and want to be visible. Making sure people have enough water and snacks for those events. Providing transportation to and from, because that can be tricky. And even just asking, "how can I best support you?"

All of this is rooted in community. Literally knowing who your neighbors are on a level that builds trust – not just the people around you here in our worship space, but the people who live in your building, or your neighborhood. Spending time with them, learning who they are, and building relationships with them by letting them learn about you, too. And that takes intentional conversation, and it takes time.

But trust is built through those offerings of time and intention. And from that trust comes a life of abundance.

The five thousand families that were with Jesus that day, in that moment as they waited to eat, they were all one community. Maybe not one that was tightly-knit, but one in which the individual people were aware that they were part of something bigger than themselves.

And when I envision what it was like for Jesus to distribute the food, I picture him handing it to people here and there as he walked through the crowd – and then *they* and their family group help make sure it gets to everyone else. Much like we do today when we're passing food around at a family event.

Because Jesus didn't ask *if* the people should be fed but, rather, how *can* they be fed. And all it took was one person offering what they had.

When we talk about building community, being there for each other, and helping each other it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that everyone has to do everything. But *no one* can do everything. It's impossible. And Jesus never expects that of us.

He has given each of us what we need – our individual gifts and talents and passions. That's what we offer. And it's more than enough. Because Jesus takes it, and blesses it, and gives it. The same actions that we remember in the Lord's Supper.

A bite of bread and a sip of wine or grape juice don't seem like much, but they strengthen and sustain us *each time* we receive them.

It's miraculous, really. And it assures us that, in Jesus, abundance is what he brings and what we receive.

Thanks be to God! Amen.