

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you O' Lord. Amen.

This week we are taking a hiatus from the Gospel of Mark and for the next five weeks we will be reading from the Gospel of John, chapter 6, hearing how Jesus is the bread of life. In this week's text we have the combined stories of the feeding of the five thousand and Jesus walking on water. If you recall, these are the same stories the lectionary skipped over in Mark last week. While the feeding of the five thousand is found in the synoptic gospels as well, in John's gospel, he calls it a "sign"; meaning that something is being revealed about God through Jesus. This sign reveals that Jesus satisfies every human need physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Not only does Jesus satisfy every human need but as we hear in the Gospel and the reading from 2nd Kings, our needs are satisfied in abundance with some left over. In these stories, we witness the inbreaking of God who takes what we have to offer and makes it enough for all. For God desires a world where those who hunger, and thirst are satisfied.

The reading from 2nd Kings, while only three verses, closes a chapter of three narratives of prophetic provision. First, in 2 Kings 4:1-7, a widow cries out to the prophet Elisha for assistance during a period of dire need and in danger of losing her children to slavery. Elisha commands her to obtain as many vessels as possible, which then miraculously get filled with oil, which the woman uses to pay her debts (4:7). Then in verses 38-41, in the midst of a famine, Elisha instructs his servants to boil a pot of stew. At first the people spat the soup out crying that it was poison. Elisha commanded them to add flour to the soup and upon the second tasting recognized the soup as edible.

And finally in today's reading, we hear about an unnamed man who brings twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain. Elisha commands the man to set it before the 100 gathered people, to which the man questions "How can I set this before a hundred people?" We hear a similar question in the gospel's feeding of the 5,000 from Andrew regarding the 5 barley loaves and 2 fish, "But what are they among so many people?"

In our stories today, people and their ordinary things, like bread, fish, vessels, and stew, become vehicles for God's miracles of abundance. At first these people and things are by no means adequate to satisfy the needs of the gathered people; there was doubt and questioning. While the commands of Elisha and Jesus didn't make sense, the man, the woman, the servant and the disciples were still obedient to them. They had faith, putting their trust in God. These stories provide us with an opportunity to marvel at how God provided abundantly with what each of them had to offer.

The struggle for us is that too often the ways of the world draw us away from putting our trust in God and cause us to believe that we live in scarcity rather than abundance. The individualistic consumption culture causes us to look only to our own needs, believing that there is not enough to go around or that we are not enough. We want to help others but then fear there is not enough for ourselves or our families. John Templeton puts it this way: "Would it surprise you to learn that everything in your life right now is pretty much the way you made it? That from hundreds of options you chose your responses to whatever situations presented themselves? Would you agree that you have exercised the capacity to choose what you have received? If so, doesn't it stand to reason that if you made the choice in the first place, you can change it?"

What a powerful notion! Whatever happens to you, you can say, "I am the master of my life."

But just as the good that comes to you is a demonstration of your mastery, so is the negative. Consider how hopping fleas are trained. The fleas are put into a glass jar. As they try and jump in the jar, they bump their heads on the lid. Over time, they forget they can jump and, for fear of bumping their heads, never go beyond the limits of the jar, even though the lids have been removed. Through continued failure they have become conditioned to confinement. So, it is with us, if we let it be. Our self-made limitations sometimes cause us to forget that we can fly. WE RESPOND LIKE THE DISCIPLES, "WE ONLY HAVE FIVE SMALL LOAVES OF BREAD AND TWO FISH. We often needlessly confine ourselves to glass jars. We may yearn to use our lives creatively, but our invisible prisons remind us: "You can't do that. It isn't practical. You're not smart enough. It will cost too much. People will laugh at you. You're too young. You're too old. Your health won't allow it. Your parents won't allow it. It will take too long. You don't have the education."

But suppose we could remember that we were made to achieve? SUPPOSE THAT WE COULD REMEMBER THAT MIRACLES DO HAPPEN? Suppose we really believed that we are children and heirs of this magnificent universe? Would we then still allow our jars to limit us to hopping just so far and no further? Suppose we became aware that resentments, hurts, hates, grudges, illness, greed and the like are glass jars that have been, or can be, removed, that, indeed, we may be hampered by the illusion of our own self-imposed limitations? We attract to ourselves whatever our minds are focused upon.

Once aware, we can change and then we will no longer be confined to that glass jar. We will be ready and able to achieve.”¹

Someone wisely once said, “Our life is God’s gift to us. What we make of life is our gift to God.” We all have things that we can offer up to God to see God’s kingdom revealed here on earth. The Apostle Paul reminds us in the

¹ Templeton, John Mark. Discovering the Laws of Life: Lowered Expectations, Continuum, 1995,242.
<https://sermons.com/illustrations>. Accessed and edited by H. Link on 7/25/24.

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reading from Ephesians this morning that we are “rooted and grounded” in the love of Jesus Christ that dwells deeply within us. And through us Jesus not only provides for us in abundance but accomplishes far more through us for the sake of others than we can possibly imagine. Today the Good News invites us to wonder and imagine how might we become God’s unlimited holy vessels who are open to the call of service to others? How might our ordinary gifts be multiplied to sustain our neighbors, our communities, and the world beyond?

Amen.