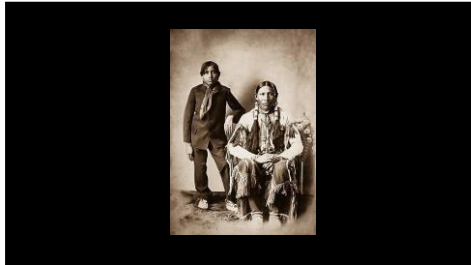


July 28, 2024
John 6:1-13
More than Enough
Michael Stanfield

After 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 towards 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. When the people saw the sign that he had done, the people began to say, ‘This indeed is the prophet who is to come into the world!’”



A Native American medicine man, along with his protégé, were walking together when they came to the edge of a settler’s farm. The medicine man halted the boy and pointed to an oak about a hundred feet from the farmer’s hen house.



There sat two unlikely branch-mates – a chicken hawk and a buzzard. The man saw it as an opportunity to teach the budding young medicine man an important lesson.

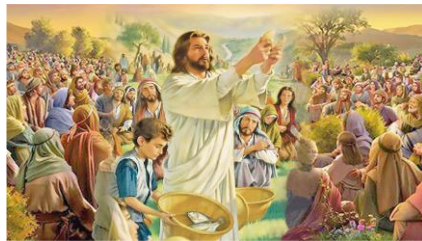
He said, “See that chicken hawk. He is a skilled hunter and honored for his acrobatic feats. But observe the truth of the mountains. It is the buzzard who is the wiser. For the chicken hawk often depends too much on his own ability and is therefore impatient. His mantra is that the Great Spirit only helps those who help themselves. Yet see the buzzard. Though he is reviled for his connection to death, he is infinitely more patient, knowing in his heart that if one simply waits and watches, the Great Spirit will provide what is needed and more.”

At that a chicken strolled out of the farmer’s barn. As the chicken hawk took flight after the chicken, the Shaman said, as if speaking for the bird, “The Great Spirit only helps those who help themselves.”

Well, the farmer, who evidently heard the commotion in his barn yard, came running out and immediately blasted the chicken hawk. After the farmer went back inside, The Shaman and his apprentice observed as the buzzard flew down to the dead chicken hawk lying on the ground and began to peck at the fresh carcass. Now, as if speaking for the buzzard, the old shaman said, “Indeed, the Great Spirit will provide what is needed and more.” And it wasn’t long before no less than 7 buzzards had descended and commenced their feasting.

I share this little story because it illustrates in ironic fashion the question that is at the heart of our morning text – and that is – do you operate your life more out of a mentality of the chicken hawk as in “God only helps those who help themselves” or do you operate your life more out of the mentality of the buzzard, as in “God will provide”?

Our text is about the amazing way in which God provides for us.



I suspect, if you are like me, this story of the feeding of the five thousand is one of the very first you remember learning in Sunday School when you were about 5 or 6 years old.

It is one of the few miracle accounts of Jesus that is to be found in all four gospels. And of course, the version of the story that is taught to most children is *this* one from the 6th chapter of John – the reason being that John adds the detail that the five loaves and two fish belonged to a little boy who, through his simple act of sharing, contributed to all those folks not going hungry that day.

In all 4 versions of this feeding of the multitudes, it is preceded by Jesus initially trying to get away from the crowds with the disciples in a boat. The reason, as Matthew tells it, is that Jesus has just heard of the death of John the Baptist at the hands of Herod. So, Jesus is grieving and pensive. Again, according to Matthew, he desires to be by himself – to contemplate this set of events, to consider his journey to the cross, and to pray. But the crowd presses in and so Jesus

ends up teaching all day. When it gets to be past supper time his disciples suggest that he dismiss the crowd so they can go find something to eat. This seems like a very practical and reasonable request. However, Christ's response is a seemingly impossible expectation: "You give them something to eat."

And here, in John's version, Jesus *assumes* that he and his disciples are hosts to the people and asks his disciples to come up with the resources to feed them. Philip replies, 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get even a little.' All of the disciples are taken aback. "Look at all the people! All we've got are five loaves and two fish. We don't have near enough! After all, we're in the religion business, not catering. You've already done your job. Why don't you just tell them to skat and do the best they can on their way home?"



"We don't have near enough..." Aren't we familiar with this response?

"We don't have near enough..." It can be the response of a wife who's trying to keep peace; to make marriage better in troubled times. She is convinced that she's giving more than her share but the total still adds up to something that is less than satisfying for either *her* or her husband. They each say, "We don't have near enough communication, or honesty, or attention, or love."

"We don't have near enough..." It can be the response of parents who are worried about their young children. They often have so many unknown friends, sneak peeks at shows with little or no moral center and spend all their time on their cell phones. So, parents wonder what they're to do to counter this cultural tide. Their cry is: "We don't have near enough of the right kind of influences..."

"We don't have near enough..." It can be the response of the employee whose employer never has a kind word or expression of encouragement. The employee says "I don't have near enough other opportunities to quit this lousy job"

"We don't have near enough..." It can be the response of many of us when age and or disability results in making our world considerably smaller. We say, "We don't have near enough energy or mobility or memory to do much of anything anymore."

"We don't have near enough..." It's the response of elders in small churches across this country when trying to provide a viable, vibrant ministry. It's the response that all of us offer when life and our responsibilities seem larger than our resources to deal with it.

And there's the rub, isn't it? Jesus seems to be asking for more than we have to give, as spouses, parents, employees or disciples. Jesus asks each of us to love when there is no chance that we'll

be loved back, to forgive when we've been hurt beyond repair, and to remain positive about outcomes when the situation seems all but hopeless.

“Jesus, you've got to be kidding. The twelve of us have just a tiny bit of food.” It's just not enough.

But that is just the point: alone, on their own, with the mentality of ‘God only helps those who help themselves’ which, by the way is not *in* the Bible despite the number of times that lazy novelists and Hollywood script writers insist that it is – with that mentality, the disciples *don't* have enough; *won't* have enough will *never* have enough.

But recognition of and surrender to Christ's presence allows any people gathered in his name to count on not just having *enough* but on having *more* than enough – more love, more forgiveness, more hope, more resources – more of what it takes to live faithfully, freely, gracefully, lovingly. And so:



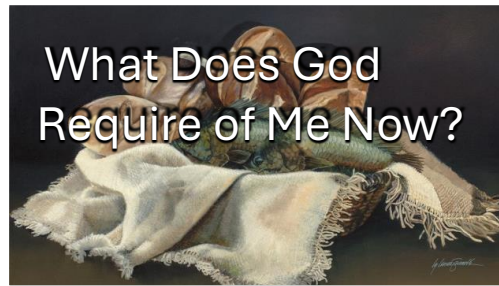
A people gathered plus Christ always equals more than enough.

Jesus was not discouraged by the seeming lack of resources. He simply pointed out that it was almost dinnertime and that his guests would appreciate something to eat.

To me, this is the first and best example of real ministry and real mission in the whole Bible.



But you know, we live in a culture that thrives on perceived scarcity. “Do I have enough?” is a thought we are programmed to have from the time we are tots. It's the only thing that makes a consumer society based on infinite economic growth really work. However, in today's text, Christ implies that we are asking the wrong question. Christ assumes that where God is present loved and honored there is always enough.



The real question then is really, “What does God require of me now, in this moment?”

In other words, “What do I believe I am really called to do?”



One day when I was going into the hospital, there was a mother and her little girl walking just ahead of me. Just before they got to the entrance, the little girl stopped and asked, “How are we going to get inside? There are no handles on those doors.” The mother simply smiled and walked forward, and the electronic eye opened the door automatically and they walked in.

I wonder if we don’t spend too much of our time standing in front of closed doors. We stand there, thinking how impossible it will be for us to get through. But in cases like that, Jesus’ advice to us is this. He says, “Step forward in faith, and trust me to open the right doors.”

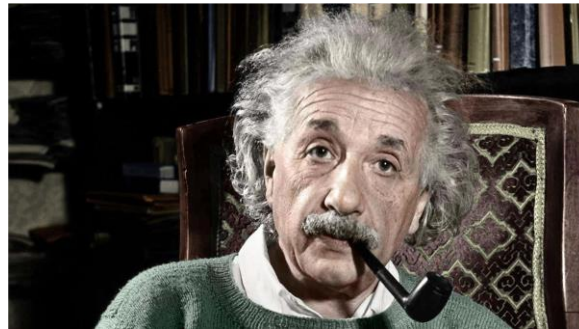
However, it’s not just about “Jesus and me against the world.” either – because an attitude of Jesus plus me against the world has only proven time and time again to create nothing but conflict and pain.



Remember: it’s a people gathered plus Christ that always equals more than enough.



It's when Jesus is present in the gathered community with *all* of us recognizing and paying attention both to him and to each other that we can be patient and discover that we have more than enough. The troubled couple, parent, employee, assisted living resident, or church member is not alone with their seemingly meager resources. The miracle of plenty happens when I realize that it's not just about me and what *I* can or can't provide, but about how through faith, *together* we *can* rediscover that we have way more than enough if I simply give generously from what I have...



Albert Einstein famously said, "The way I see it you have two ways to live your life: the one as if no miracles exist and the other as though everything is a miracle."

But, of course, this begs the question, "What is a miracle?"



I am of the mind that when the meager basket of bread and fish was passed among the people, they dug into their pockets to add the *secret* bit of bread and fish that they had had all along. The generous spirit of Jesus touched them in such a profound way that they suddenly understood that what they had was his.

By the time the baskets had been passed around, the people had taken enough to eat but also put a little back in to share with others because that seemed like the only right thing to do.

If this is so, does it make what happened any less of a miracle than if the bread and fish were supernaturally transformed?

What matters is that the gospel tells us when the faithful begin to act with faith, putting *all* of their resources together, miraculous things begin to happen. When we trust in God, and act with compassion, scarcity is transformed into abundance. We have more than enough.

I have seen that happen here at Trinity again and again and again in my time here. When this congregation believes that Christ is calling for this congregation to step forward in faith, it does, such that there is not just enough, but more than enough.

I want you to recall that when the pandemic struck, we were not online; we had no visual means of supporting the worship service even when that service was in-person only. Anticipating the need to close down in-person worship, on Friday, March 13, I put out a plea for possible funding that would allow us to do worship online. I didn't say how much might be needed but that we were getting ready to have the need. Within five minutes of putting that out, I had a pledge from an individual of \$10,000. And when I alerted key individuals, they immediately came up with a list of exactly what would be needed and ordered the equipment right away.

It arrived from Amazon within days. A crew was put together, the equipment was set up and as a result, we were up and running live stream by March 22. Our last in person worship before the pandemic was March 15, and we at Trinity never missed a single Sunday worshipping live together.

Now we could have said, we don't have any way to worship either online or in-person, we will just have to let the congregation fend for themselves. But the arrival of covid and the pandemic became an opportunity for the leaders of this congregation to demonstrate their faith. Christ is calling us we all said. We just need to step out in faith and we will have enough.

Then last year – yes, only a year ago, the session, led by Bill Kennedy came to you with a pretty big ask. The message was that in order to continue ministry and mission from this building as our headquarters into the foreseeable future significant upgrades were required – upgrades to the tune of nearly \$400,000. Within two weeks, *just two weeks*, mind you, together we had enough pledges to take care of the upgrades and then some. And it happened because enough people loved and trusted each other and the leadership here at Trinity, and saw that in the request, Christ was asking each of us to bring what we had. And the miracle happened: we had more than enough – a miracle that was about more than building maintenance. It was about an attitude of abundance.

In the same way, Jesus' miracle on the hillside was about more than loaves and fishes – a lot more. "Bring what you *do* have to me." That's what Jesus says in the passage. And that's always the antidote – the antidote for when we feel small, ill equipped, or overwhelmed by the tasks before us. "Bring to me what you do have and I will make it more than adequate for not just what you need but for what the world needs."

Who could have anticipated how many people around the country, many of whom previously did not know we existed, would be tuning in regularly every week to worship with us?

And what exciting thing does God have in Trinity's future now that you have a building that is ready to host others in a way you perhaps never could before...

As you make the transition from me as your pastor to whatever comes next, I hope you will remember that you are, and always have been a congregation that authentically lives this command of Jesus: "Bring me what you have and let's share it. If you do, it will be more than enough of what you need for the journey ahead."

Let us Pray: Gracious Lord, we confess that we can often be a lot like the chicken hawk who believes that if we don't help ourselves, help won't come. Inspire us by your teachings and your calling to be like the buzzard, trusting that our help will indeed come if we are willing simply to give what we have without reservation. Amen.