

We've been jolted out of our progression through the Gospel of Mark this week with this passage from John's Gospel. It's the first of five Sundays where we will take a deep look at the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of John, a substantive reflection on the Bread of Life. And it begins here, with the feeding of the 5,000.

This story, this miracle, really isn't so much about Jesus' compassion for a hungry crowd, but rather highlights the power of God in and through Jesus in partnership with us.

The disciples are gathered with Jesus on the mountaintop, and people start coming from every direction. Jesus begs the question on everyone's mind: What are we going to do about all these hungry people? (But notice: he doesn't ask, "what am *I* going to do to feed all these hungry people," but rather uses the plural we.) The disciples' reaction is to vocalize their worry that they cannot possibly feed so many and they become rather distraught. 'Can't do it,' says one. 'We have some, but not nearly enough,' says another.

The faithful of God know that Jesus could easily have provided for all of those people on that mountaintop. But instead, Jesus invites all those who have come up that mountain to listen to his teachings and learn about God's involvement in the world to participate in the miracle-making. As such, the miracle is manifest through the active participation of those who are gathered in his name.

I think the disciples' initial questions highlight our natural reaction to problems that feel too big to tackle.

Like many of you, I'm sure, I've endured my fair share of long nights in bed, agonizing over problems that seemed too much to handle. The endless loops of 'what if's' swarming around, the regrets over the paths not taken, and a fear growing within which threatens to rob me of what little reason I feel I may have left. I experience repetitive, defeatist, seemingly never-ending thought cycles that leave me feeling bone tired and spiritually weary and fearful and alone.

I find comfort in Paul's words from Ephesians: "I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love." That's not at all how I feel when I'm in that dark space.

When we go through these spiritually-empty spin cycles, we get locked into feeling that there is not enough. "I don't know the Bible well enough to know how to pray and ask God for what I need. I don't have the spiritual maturity or stamina to deal with all this bad news and see a way forward. I feel like no one understands what I'm going through. I did that terrible-awful thing which means I'm a terrible-awful person and not worthy of being forgiven." These inner monologues are not evidence of being rooted and grounded in love.

So often, the people I view as stalwarts of the faith, whose lives are too often marked by tragedy, yet who seem to abide in a place of union and communion with God through all of life's ups and downs, are like mighty oaks. Regardless of what life throws at them, they stand tall, they continue to put one foot in front of the other despite having (what I view as) many reasons to give up. So Paul's imagery of being rooted and grounded in love speaks to me – roots that grow deep to seek out nourishment and provide stability. And the warm, protective earth that covers these roots, that serves as a sturdy place for the growing tree to anchor itself.

Paul continues, "I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

God calls us to something bigger, which Jesus points out on that mountaintop. When faced with something that makes me feel overwhelmed, **I** am not the one who needs to find solutions, **we** are to find solutions. As he points out, it's me and Jesus and all the saints. The entire community ~ together. No one is expected to go it alone.

And so the disciples, with Jesus and the entire crowd of 5,000 people join in the holy work together. Despite their skepticism, they gave what they had, and a miracle happened.

The feeding of the 5000 isn't a miracle because Jesus provided the food, but rather because those who showed up were willing to give what they had and share it with others. No one greedily hoarded the blessings they arrived with or that were shared with them: those who were hungry ate what they needed and passed the rest on to the next person so they also could get what they needed. The result was that there was more than enough to go around.

When we get sucked in to thinking that there's not enough of whatever it is that we believe we need, fear (not love) is what has taken root. "Fear measures scarcity carefully and says that there is never enough, and certainly not enough for everyone. Fear makes us feel like we are sinking. Fear makes us grab onto the wrong things to protect and even save us. Fear contributes to the strong winds and stormy seas that come our way. Fear makes us miss the hand that is held out to us, telling us to fear not. Fear blinds us and prevents us from recognizing that God is God, and we are not, and that we can float, in trust, on top of the water, resting, as Soren Kierkegaard once said, on the buoyancy of God."<sup>1</sup>

I hope all of us here know that we've got an entire community to whom we can go who will have our back. None of us are expected to have all the answers, or to go it alone. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said, we ought not be overwhelmed by the worries of the world, but rather "do our little bits of good where we are, because it's those bits of good put together that overwhelm the world."

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ucc.org/worship\\_samuel\\_sermon\\_seeds\\_july\\_29\\_2018](http://www.ucc.org/worship_samuel_sermon_seeds_july_29_2018)