

¹³ Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. ¹⁵ When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the towns and buy food for themselves." But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away; you give them to eat." And he said, "We have only five loaves and two fish." ¹⁸ And he said, "Bring them here to me." ¹⁹ Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰ And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. ²¹ And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children. *Matthew 14:13-21*

Abundance!

“Abundance!”

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
 Saturday and Sunday, August 5-6, 2017
 All Services
 The Reverend John H. Brock
 Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
 Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Isaiah 55:1-5; Psalm 148:8-9, 14-21;
 Matthew 14:13-21

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

I was out in my back yard scraping the shed the one afternoon this last week when we didn't have torrential rain, working to remove the paint that's at least twenty-year-old. While I was doing that, I reflected upon many things, not the least of which is that I am very glad I now have not only the strength, but the inclination to repaint the shed, especially after the last couple of years I've had. These past couple of years have been a little rough, what with my body trying to kill me, first with the cardiac bypass surgery I needed, and then with the lymphoma diagnosis. I have to tell you, I'm a little tired of being sick. I'm not to say that I'm banging on all eight cylinders again, but I am feeling better than I have in many, many months.

Actually, I hadn't really realized how **not good** I had been feeling until these past couple of weeks. I reviewed my job description and recognized, *Nope, not doing that, not doing that, nope not that one.* I didn't realize how depressed I've been, how inwardly focused I was. When your body tries to kill you a couple of different ways, I can kind of understand that. I won't say that I **now** have an *abundance* of energy, but I am feeling *much, much better.*

Anyway, as I was scraping away at the paint, I was thinking about all the changes, the improvements, and the *modifications* we have made to our home in the fifteen years we've been there. It's **not** the same today as when we moved in.

Since moving in, we have: installed new windows and insulated the walls (both of those help to keep the wind from blowing *through* the house and made a *huge* difference in our heating bill). We installed a couple of new exterior doors. We put in new flooring throughout the first floor. We've put new roofing on the back porch; replaced rotted siding; rebuilt and finished the enclosed back porch, and painted the exterior (a couple of times). We replaced the old oil burner furnace with a high efficiency gas Heating and Cooling system, so now we have heat **and** central air. This past fall, we repaved the nearly forty-year-old macadam on our driveway. And, we finally this spring we got a deck built off the backside of the house, something we've wanted to do since we moved in.

Some of those things were *necessary* for the ongoing care of the house, which is

pushing 200 years old (it was built in 1824). If we hadn't done some of those things, like replacing the windows and insulating the walls, well, we'd be uncomfortable, but the house would still be livable. Other things, though, like painting the bare, exposed wood, or replacing the rotting siding, without doing *those* things, we'd be jeopardizing the overall *health* of the house. Still other things, like the deck and the flooring, if we hadn't done them, the house wouldn't be as enjoyable as it is, but it would still be functional.

We were *able* to do all those things, though, **in part** because both Marianne & I work full time, and *also* because we have been able to use money from savings, **and**, like many of us, we took out a home equity loan. And while we are not independently wealthy, we have . . . enough. We have, I would even argue - cautiously - that my spouse and I have an *abundance*. We are not in want for food or shelter. We have a roof over our heads, a bed to sleep in, and food on the table. The electricity comes on whenever we flick the switch. We are able to pay our bills every month, pretty much on time. Like the majority of Americans, we are in debt; but so far that's been manageable. We have *enough*. We can even say we have an *abundance*.

Our gospel reading is Matthew's telling of the feeding of the five thousand. Well, really, it's about feeding way *more* than five thousand. But this story is **not** the status quo when compared to what's happened in Matthew's gospel up until our reading today.

Up until this point in Matthew's gospel, Jesus has: healed people; talked to people; calmed a storm; walked on water; cast out demons, and given sermons to presumably *huge* groups of people (the Sermon on the Mount is in Matthew's gospel). But then he's sent them on their way. He's said, *thanks for coming, see y'all later*. He has not **fed** them before.

So why is he, **here**, suddenly saying here, to the disciples, "You give them something to eat"?

We don't know anything, really, about this gospel event, other than what we have written. I rather think that in some respect, Jesus was *testing* the disciples, wanting to see how they would react. And I have to be honest, I don't think they responded all that well:

It's late, Jesus; this place is deserted; send them away to take care of themselves. "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish."

Which in turn, raises in my mind the questions: How *close* were those villages? Did those who had gathered there *have* money to purchase food? Would the villages have *enough* food to feed that many people?

Let me ask you this: Has God ever put a challenge in your life? And if so, how have you reacted?

This event, this healing and feeding time, was once *again* a time of *faith growth*, a time of *change*, for the disciples. It was **not** their status quo. In their experience with Jesus thus far, when you get a large crowd, that's great. Those folks have come out to *hear* Jesus, fantastic! They want to be healed by him, watch him heal others, listen to whatever he has to say, all of that is so unbelievably cool. But now the disciples are

supposed to **FEED** this mass of humanity? I can just hear the disciples think,
Feed them? Are you kidding me, Jesus?

I think this story allows us, us today, to look at something familiar in a new way. Because it is a change in the way things have been done, it's a change in the status quo, a change in the way the disciples had been doing things, a new way of looking at a situation.

Did you pay attention to verse 21?

*And those who ate were about five thousand men, **besides women and children.***

The only humans who were counted, apparently, the only ones who were kept track of, were the **males**. Who knows *how many* women were there? How many kids? How many wives or mothers or sisters or aunts? We don't know. I'm willing to guess there's at least *half* again as many women and children as there are men.

Let me say, I have *rarely* met a mother who has gone somewhere **with her child**, especially to some type of large gathering, who didn't have on her person somewhere, food for her kids.

I think we might have two miracles going on here: **Jesus** blessing the fish and loaves to make food to feed people, *and* the people that are there *sharing their own food* with those around them. Sharing with people they knew, and maybe even sharing with strangers.

How many of us, here, have abundance? If we do, what are we doing with it?

With this telling of the story, Matthew reminds us, *again*, that God is with us. God is with us in the good stuff, when everything is "As it should be." God is with us in the lousy stuff, when the darkness is closing in, when we're hungry and tired and sick.

With this telling of the story, Matthew reminds us, that faith brings about Change. Faith brings change in our attitude. Faith brings change in our understanding. Faith **is** change. *Life* is change. Whether it's repainting a shed, or replacing worn out windows, or adding on a new deck. Whether that change is getting veins moved around in your body so your heart keeps working or getting a device installed in your own body to allow medication to directly attack the disease. Whether that change is simply moving a piece of furniture in our worship space to see if that new placement helps us to better understand that God is here, God is *with* us, God is in the *midst* of us. God is here in the midst of us to help us better understand that God gives us life and love and joy and strength and grace and forgiveness, and God gives those to each and every one of us **abundantly**.

So, as we are filled with God's abundance, let us go forth sharing that abundance, with all whom we encounter.

Amen.

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