

"Give Them Something to Eat"
Mark 6:30-44

Pastor Liz Miller
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As a church, we are in the business of feeding God's people. We do that quite literally - every Wednesday night there is a community dinner where people bring food, pass a plate, and share a meal together. We do that symbolically, each month we eat a piece of bread and drink a sip of juice at the communion table as a reminder of the spiritual food that is found in God's love. We do that metaphorically - feeding each other spiritual connection in worship, sharing feasts of community support in the midst of life's transitions, and we are charged to go out to feed our neighbors through our social justice advocacy and radical inclusion for all people.

We inherited this business of feeding people from Jesus who frequently sat down for meals with his disciples, invited himself over to people's house for dinner as a sign of his compassion and love, and spiritually fed a community of people who hungered for healing and acceptance. Jesus's ministry continues to feed those of us who hunger for equity and freedom from poverty and a world define by peace instead of war.

The Gospel story of the feeding of the great crowd, by some accounts there were five thousand people that day, is my favorite feeding story. It's the meal that reminds me that anyone can go into the feeding business. You don't have to be a gourmet chef. You don't have to be the perfect host or hostess. You might even be reluctant to feed people or unsure if you're equipped for the task.

That's certainly how the disciples were feeling when after a long day of traveling and teaching, they found themselves in the middle of nowhere with a huge, hungry crowd in front of them. There were no food trucks. There were no grocery stores. There was just their own overwhelmed, tired, selves, and Jesus, facing a crowd so large the disciples felt like they would

be consumed by the crowd's needs if they didn't send them away. The disciples didn't believe they had enough to feed everyone that day. They tried to reason with Jesus. They encouraged him to dismiss the crowd to the nearby villages where there was more food on offer, where the crowds would be able to feed themselves, where the disciples would be left behind in peace and quiet.

The disciples were unconvinced they had what it took to feed everyone. It's not that they didn't understand the need that was before them. The hunger was obvious. They simply questioned whether they were the ones called to prepare the meal and distribute it among the crowds. The question they asked is one we still ask in our own feeding ministries: will what we have to offer or what we do be enough?

Every month when our worship team prepares communion, they try to strike a balance of cutting enough bread cubes so that there is enough for everyone in attendance that day - a number that unpredictably fluctuates - but not so much that it is wasteful. Our worship team looks at the trays of bread that they have prepared and ask, "Will it be enough?"

Our Green Team and Racial Justice Team work to educate the congregation about issues that have real consequences in the world and in people's lives. The Green Team sees the threat of the climate crisis and the predicted ways it will upend the lives of our children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The Racial Justice Team understands that when we do not the work of eradicating racism in our hearts and in our organizations and in our political and education systems, that lives are at stake. These two teams, faced with a world that hungers for climate hope and racial justice, look at the work before them and asks themselves, "Will it be enough?"

And our Finance Committee, a group of church members tasked with stewarding our budget each year, making sure we are fiscally responsible and faithful in how we use our

collective funds...they look at rising costs of living for our staff and the rising costs of maintaining an aging building and the rising costs of feeding each other and our neighbors through programs and outreach, they look at the rising costs compared to our stagnant income on the balance sheet month and they ask, "Will it be enough?"

The hunger is obvious. We know that we are called to serve in our communities. We know that there are people who are longing for a place where they are worship with their whole selves without being asked to leave their gender identity or their sexuality at home. We know there are people who long for a place where mental health and mental health struggles are honored. We know there are people who hunger to hear messages of a God who loves them not despite of who they are, but because of who they are. When we unlock the doors on Sunday morning, when our staff and volunteers work together to create spaces to deepen relationships and grow community, we ask each other: will it be enough? Will we be able to feed those before us who hunger or should we send them somewhere else? Should we encourage them to seek out a bigger church or an older church or a church that proclaims to have all the answers and all the solutions to life's problems?

The disciples worried they didn't have enough to offer the hungry crowd. They thought they would have to drain their resources to go out and buy all the bread they could find and even then, it might not be enough to go around. Jesus reorients and reassures them. He asks what they have amongst them. Five loaves of bread, two fish. He takes the food, he blesses it, and it is passed amongst the crowds. Everyone eats. Everyone's hunger is satisfied. Everyone receives what they need.

The lesson is this: what we have is enough. When we look amongst ourselves at what we have, the gifts we have to offer in terms of volunteer commitments and ministry skills and

leadership experiences, it is enough to feed our community. When we pool our resources, when every person gives a financial gift according to what they have to give, that annual budget is enough. When we work together to feed the crowds, we find that there is enough to share so that even the laborers have something to eat.

When we shirk back because we are afraid that what we have to offer will not be enough, that is when we go hungry. When we decide that our financial pledge of \$20 a month is not as meaningful as someone else's \$200 a month's pledge, we go hungry. When we decide our small-is church is too small or too inconsequential or too....fill in the blank with whatever story you have told yourself or heard about not being enough....When we decide we are not enough so we might as well send the crowds away to be fed somewhere else, that is when when the hunger turns to famine.

Jesus reminds his disciples that all it takes is what they already have. When we offer something for the feeding of God's children, when we offer what was God's to begin with back in service to our shared ministry, it will be blessed and it will become a blessing to others.

Our church has been built on the idea that what we have to offer amongst us is enough. Each year we ask our members and our friends and supporters to discern if they are able to make a financial commitment to the church. We talk about money in a culture that tells us money is supposed to be private. We make an audacious ask that people give back to God what God has given to them. We do this knowing the demands on all of our personal finances - the rising food and healthcare costs, the student loan crisis, the unsteady market that impacts retirement budgets. We don't ask for more than you have or more than you can give, but we do ask you to consider: what do I have to offer? What can I give that when added to what others have to give will be

multiplied in such a way that we are all fed and we are able to feed whoever comes with a hunger inside of them?

When we each commit to giving what we are able, when together we bless those gifts through our prayers and promises, somehow, it is enough. We could always use more - of course - our dreams regularly outpace our resources - but each year we discover that somehow, what we have to offer is enough.

We repeat this story of the miracle of the fishes and loaves quite frequently in the life of the church. On communion Sundays when the gathered worshippers far outnumber those we expected, a communion server will whisper to me at the end, I was so afraid we would run out but look! We had just enough! Or our youth program will try a new thing, provide a gathering space for families together and we'll wonder if anyone will come, but because we listened to what people were hungry for, because we gave what we had to offer, our leaders will come back and say, "People came and it was wonderful! We were able to give them just what they were looking for!" Or our justice teams will look back on the ways our commitments to our values have deepened and spread throughout the congregation and into the community over years of faithful advocacy and they will say, "I never imagined we would make such a difference or that we would be equipped to have the kind of meaningful conversations we can have today."

Time after time, offering after offering, piece by piece, what we have is enough. We are not asked to be something we aren't. We aren't asked to give something we don't have. We aren't asked to change into somebody else or a different church. We are asked to look around together, to discern the gifts that we have to share, to offer them up to be blessed, and then to work together to feed God's people. With Christ's blessing, with our collective commitment, the hunger will be satiated and after all that have been fed, we might discover, just like the disciples

did, that there are leftovers, extra bread, more fish to spare, enough to continue feeding each other for years to come. May it be so. Amen.