



July 25, 2021
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John 6:1-15
“Abundant Grace”



Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover Festival was near. When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages[a] to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!” Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?” Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. John 6:1-15

This world finds itself trapped in a bizarre reality. Too much water in the form of floods that overwhelm sewers, destroy homes, and decimate lives. Too little water in the form of droughts that parches the land, kills crops, and decimates lives.

Both cause a scarcity of resources, which is the precise problem confronted by the disciples. There is not enough bread and fish to feed the crowds. Jesus knows the solution but he wants them to be confronted by the challenge. After all, they will not always have Him in the flesh to solve their problems so simply.

The disciples will discover that in Jesus’ presence, scarcity is only a product of a fearful mind, that fear itself can turn abundance into scarcity, and that by entrusting all things to our Lord; the

merest of crumbs can become a superabundance of God’s blessing.

Humanity’s ability to see or actually create scarcity in the midst of abundance is one of our greatest failures. Pulitzer Prize winning anthropologist, Jarod Diamond, believes the Greenland Vikings disappeared from history in part because they first created real scarcity in the midst of abundance and, in turn, saw only scarcity in the midst of real abundance.

The Vikings migrated to Greenland from Iceland around 1000 A.D. and lived there for centuries. The Vikings began by creating scarcity from abundance through their building methods. They used acre upon acre of some of the richest soil on the earth to build their homes. Eventually it simply ran out so that they could not grow enough food. Next, they could see only scarcity in the midst of abundance,

both in friends and in food. Accustomed to their European food patterns of crops and livestock they failed to see riches of the sea. The nomadic Inuit people had been traversing Greenland for eons but they failed to establish peaceable relations with them. They referred to them as “skrælings”, which means weak people, and often killed them wantonly. The Inuit of course lived off the sea, in large part ringed seals and whales, but the Vikings never learned how to hunt them because they never made friends with the Inuit. Therefore, the Greenland Vikings disappeared from history because they created scarcity from abundant food, failed to tap into the abundant knowledge of the Inuit, which led them to fail to see the superabundant resource of the sea.

The disciples had the same deficient mindset. They see the hungry multitudes and can only think to send them away. To Phillip’s shock, Jesus asks him where to get bread to feed them. “Six month’s wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.”

Despite the response, I don’t think Jesus was asking them to go to the surrounding village to purchase food because it would have taken too long and they probably truly didn’t have that much money. In fact, Jesus was asking them to consider performing the miracle. In fact, in Mark’s gospel Jesus says this outright, “You give them something to eat!”

Recently they had cast out demons so perhaps, with sufficient faith, Jesus had granted them the power to multiply bread as well. The obtuse response then demonstrates such a mindset of scarcity that they failed to conceive of the possibility of their own power and even more profoundly failed to see the infinite abundance of our Lord. Ironically, in our modern world of superabundant goods we have seemed to have perfected the mindset of scarcity.

Harry Potter’s cousin, Dudley, in *The Sorcerer’s Stone*, is the perfect example of creating a scarcity from abundance with only his attitude. As he looks over his dozens of birthday presents, he yells at his parents, “How many are there?” The father’s answer “thirty-five”, only feeds his anxiety, so he begins yelling again, “Thirty-five!? Last year there were thirty-seven!” It is hard to conceive of the words “only” and “thirty-five” when referring to presents at a birthday party.

But unfortunately, in our world, we too have a similarly bewildering self-made problem. First of all, Jesus would not ask the disciples to do what cannot be done and Jesus would not ask us to do what cannot be done. In commanding the disciples to feed the crowd, and commanding us to feed the hungry, He meant it and He knows it can be done. With the disciples their powers to perform miracles were required but even such a

multiplication would not work in today's world.

This miracle of multiplying food could not work beyond a few thousand people. Currently there is enough food produced worldwide to feed every person on this planet, yet according to OXFAM some eleven people die every minute of hunger compared to seven people who die every minute of COVID.

Mark tells us that as Jesus sat them down and He divided the people into orderly groups because Jesus was no fool. If He had only multiplied the food, it would have never gotten to all the hungry mouths.

The miracle required on our planet is not the multiplying of food, for it still would not get to those who need it. Air-dropped food in Africa gets stolen by warlords. Donations to Haiti often never find hungry mouths. Food in this country gets thrown away by the megaton. The miracle needed is a distribution miracle! The miracle needed is one that changes people inside – from a fear of scarcity to a celebration of abundance.

Jesus took them to a place of scant resources where he challenged the disciples to feed the people. In the midst of their fearful reaction, Andrew offers a meager thought, "There is a boy who has five loaves and two fish." He might as well have said, "I have a pack of crackers in my pocket."

But this is how it begins. The boy offers his meager resources in what would be considered in any other hands, a noble but vain gesture to help others. Out of this boy's scant resources, Jesus creates an abundance. The exact opposite of the Greenland Vikings.

Thousands of years later a 14 year old Malawian boy, William Kamkwamba also confronted scarcity. His town was parched, leaving his farming family with no income, so he was kicked out of school because he could not pay the \$80 fee. But there was something abundant and free. Something available to everyone in the village but would take the audacity of a child to believe you could do something with it.

Out of school, William Kamkwamba spent his days at the library when a picture caught his eye—a windmill. William believed that wind that only cooled off people in the village could generate electricity for the town and money to send him to school. So he scoured the junk pile gathering plastic bottles, old bicycle parts, and worn out batteries. When he started building the first windmill in 2002, word that he was "crazy" spread all over his village..."Villagers would surround him to snicker and point, ... Ignoring them, he would quietly bolt pieces using a screwdriver made of a heated nail attached to a corncob. ...Three months later, his first windmill churned to life as relief swept over him. As the blades

whirled, a bulb attached to the windmill flickered on. "I wanted to finish it just to prove them wrong," he said. "I knew people would then stop thinking I was crazy." (as reported by CNN).

His foolish hope powered a town as did the boys offering of a few loaves feed a multitude.

Jesus' miracle was not creating something out of nothing. He began with the boys offering and used it to bless so many. God acts the same today. If we have the courage to offer what we have, no matter how scant and paltry the hungry will be fed, the poor will have good news brought to them, and the prisoners will go free.

It reminds me of the final stanza of a most beautiful poem "A Christmas Carol" by Christina Rossetti that we know as the "In the Bleak Midwinter":

*What can I give Him,
poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd,
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise Man,
I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give Him:
give my heart.*

Jesus has given each of us so very much, so very, very much, so we must give Him our heart and our hope. If a child with some wind and trash can bless a town just imagine what we can do to bless this city and this world. Just imagine...but don't

stop there. The Lord expects us to give, to work, to share, and to believe. Amen.