

Rev. Karen Graham – Church of the Redeemer  
August 3, 2008  
Matthew 14: 13-21

Several years ago, Educator Parker Palmer was on route to a conference when the plane he was on made an unexpectedly long layover at an airport. A truck that was supposed to deliver the refreshments for the next leg of the journey broke down. Finally the pilot decided that it was more important to get his passengers on their way than to wait for the food to arrive, so he took off. As soon as they were in the air passengers started grumbling. “A ticket is a contract,” one said loudly, “and snacks are part of the contract.” “I ought to sue,” another muttered. After a while a minor mutiny was in the works. Then something interesting happened. A flight attendant came on the public address system. She began with the familiar information on such flights, “Ladies and gentlemen, the captain has turned off the seatbelt lights. We have now attained a cursing altitude of 30,000 feet.” Then she said something quite extraordinary: “Having served many of you on the first leg of this flight, I know some of you still have your bags of peanuts, which you stuffed in your pocket. How many do you have? Five? Please open them and share them with the people around you. I’m sure some of you still have some mints. Would you pass them around, also? Those of you with newspapers, you can only read one section at a time. Spread the other sections around for others to read. Some of you are parents or grandparents. Take out the pictures of your children or grandchildren and show them to others.” With that brief announcement she changed the emotional climate of that flight. Later, when the flight attendant came near Parker Palmer’s seat he asked her, “What’s your name? What the name of your supervisor? I want to write a letter of commendation. That was the best example of group leadership I’ve ever seen.” To which she replied, “The loaves and the fishes still work” (King Duncan, The Compassionate Christ, [www.esermons.com](http://www.esermons.com)).

“The loaves and fishes still work.”

This gospel story has a lot in it, you know. It’s one of the few stories that all 4 gospel writers include. That in itself lets us know that something important is going on here.

Over the years, I've preached on this story from a variety of perspectives. Almost always, this story is read on a Sunday when we're having communion. And that's no coincidence. For how can we hear this account of Jesus feeding the hungry crowd without thinking about this meal? Where the bread is broken? Where all are fed? Where just a little goes a long way?

Hearing the story and sharing the meal. That's really probably enough, especially on a warm Sunday morning in August. More words aren't that necessary. So I won't say much more, except for this. Which is that in this gospel story we see the difference between operating out of a perspective of scarcity and operating out of a perspective of abundance. I think you know which characters practice each perspective. Jesus tells the disciples to give the crowd something to eat. The disciples say they have nothing but five loaves and two fish. Jesus says to bring him the loaves and the fish. And by the story's end not only has everyone been fed but everyone has been filled, and there are enough leftovers to feed even more.

So, here's what I've been mulling over all week. The disciples think their something is nothing. Jesus however knows it is something. And Jesus takes that bit of something and makes it really something. To Jesus 5 loaves and 2 fish aren't nothing. They're something. They're not everything, of course. But they are something. And to Jesus something is always enough.

Like the disciples we too tend to look at our somethings and see nothing. For example, instead of focusing on what we can do with the 100 people we do have on a Sunday morning, we think about what we could do if we had 200. Our 100 seems like nothing. Or, instead of being grateful for the financial resources we have available to us as a church, we worry about the need to have more, and we wonder how we'll be able to pay all our bills and still raise enough for a new roof. How we look at things makes a difference, doesn't it? The old question, "Is the glass half empty or half full?" is the difference between living out of a model of scarcity or living out of a model of abundance. Scarcity limits us. Abundance frees us. Scarcity weakens us. Abundance

energizes us. When we operate out of scarcity we get fed. When we operate out of abundance we get filled.

The disciples bring what they think is nothing to Jesus. But 5 loaves and 2 fish aren't nothing, they are something, and by bringing that something to Jesus, it becomes more than enough.

Here's how another preacher puts it:

“We have to trust that what we bring to Jesus will be enough. When our loved one gets diagnosed with cancer we have to trust that the strength we bring to Jesus will be made enough to get through. When we know there are children who are hurting, rebelling, and dying inside we have to trust that the love we bring to Jesus is enough to reach them. When the church seems to be stagnant and running on empty we have to trust that the passion and ideas we bring to Jesus will be made enough to spark new life into an old church” (Stephen McKinney-Whitaker, ‘He Will Make It Enough’, Lectionary Homiletics, Volume XIX, Number 5, Aug-Sept 2008, p. 16).

This is good news for us, I think. What we have to offer as individuals and as a church is never nothing. Remember these other gospel stories:

A widow's two small coins were something.

A Samaritan's kindness was something.

A thief's prayer on the cross was something.

All these somethings were offered without apology, without worrying about whether they were good enough, without calculation, without reservation. And the offering of those somethings led to what? To the widow being remembered forever for her faithfulness, to a man's healing, to the thief's salvation. A little something indeed became a big something. And that's what Jesus can do, and will do. Because what we have is always enough, friends. Who we are is always enough. We don't have nothing – and we aren't

nothing. We have something, and we are someone -- and to Jesus that isn't just enough, it's more than enough.

When you come to receive this meal today, think about that meal on the hillside long ago. And when you take that little piece of bread and dip it just a bit into the cup of juice, remember that the crowd that day didn't just get a bite to eat, they were completely filled. And so it is with this meal. Here in this bread and this cup are more than enough to fill your life to overflowing too -- with forgiveness, grace, love, strength, peace, joy -- all the things you need to live abundantly as God's beloved son or daughter. May you not only be fed this morning -- may you be filled. And may you always feel free to bring all your somethings to God -- and through the power and grace and love of Jesus Christ, have those somethings transformed into more than enough for you and for everyone. Thanks be to God!