

**"HOW MUCH BREAD DO YOU HAVE?
A THEOLOGY OF ABUNDANCE"**

Mark 6:31-44

June 3, 2018

The apostles then rendezvoused with Jesus and reported on all that they had done and taught. Jesus said, "Come off by yourselves; let's take a break and get a little rest." For there was constant coming and going. They didn't even have time to eat.

So they got in the boat and went off to a remote place by themselves. Someone saw them going and the word got around. From the surrounding towns people went out on foot, running, and got there ahead of them. When Jesus arrived, he saw this huge crowd. At the sight of them, his heart broke—like sheep with no shepherd they were. He went right to work teaching them.

When his disciples thought this had gone on long enough—it was now quite late in the day—they interrupted: "We are a long way out in the country, and it's very late. Pronounce a benediction and send these folks off so they can get some supper."

Jesus said, "You do it. Fix supper for them."

They replied, "Are you serious? You want us to go spend a fortune on food for their supper?"

But he was quite serious. "How many loaves of bread do you have? Take an inventory."

That didn't take long. "Five," they said, "plus two fish."

Jesus got them all to sit down in groups of fifty or a hundred—they looked like a patchwork quilt of wildflowers spread out on the green grass! He took the five loaves and two fish, lifted his face to heaven in

prayer, blessed, broke, and gave the bread to the disciples, and the disciples in turn gave it to the people. He did the same with the fish. They all ate their fill. The disciples gathered twelve baskets of leftovers. More than five thousand were at the supper.

This afternoon we start our summer Film Series. I have chosen to begin with a wonderful film that almost nobody saw: *Hello, My Name is Doris*. Robin Meyer in his book, *Saving Jesus From the Church*, reminds us of the following truth: "Although we speak of death as the great enemy, it may be despair that haunts us even more—the idea that life itself means nothing."

How many of us slog through life leading, as Thoreau penned, lives of quiet desperation? By this I mean that it is part of the human condition to do today what we did yesterday, and what we are likely to do tomorrow. We get up, we brush our teeth and run a comb through our hair, maybe take a shower, shave, dress in clothes familiar and comfortable for us, eat our Cheerios or hot oatmeal, slam down a cup or three of coffee, feed the dogs their standard fare, and head off to work or to the gym, or to the garden, or to the easy chair. We are creatures of habit, and we rarely take stock of whether we have enough bread. We rarely engage in a Theology of Abundance.

The story of Jesus feeding the five thousand is one of the miracles stories. A miracle story is one that means, literally, a sign pointing to God. This particular miracle performed by Jesus is the only

one that appears in all four *Gospels*. Apparently, it made a lasting impression in the first century storytellers.

And apparently the miracle was not big enough the first time around. The importance of Jesus feeding the five thousand was lost on the disciples. They just didn't get it. Both Mark and Matthew are compelled to again tell the story later on in their *Gospels* in a slightly different way. Perhaps they hope that repetition will be the teacher for the disciples that the first telling was not. Mark and Matthew seem to be imploring their readers through the experience of the disciples, "C'mon, people, don't you see the gift that has been given to you? The Bread you need is right on your table. Your life is abundant!"

In the second version of the *Gosples* miracle story, Jesus only feeds four thousand people, not five thousand. Again, the disciples balk, claiming with only a little bread and a few fish, they can't possibly feed the hungry masses. Jesus responds to their frustration and doubt only with the question, "How much bread do you have?"

This time the disciples count seven loaves and a few fish. But what does it matter? I doubt Jesus was asking for an exact accounting of bread and fish. But he *was* asking for an accounting—an accounting of *faith*, trust that what they had was enough. Trust that they had abundantly more than was necessary.

This story is hard for middle class Americans to understand. While in many parts of the world, five loaves of bread and

two fish represent a full pantry, we here need, of course, a fully-stocked refrigerator, and like me, maybe another one in the garage, pantries stuffed full of food, a fast food restaurant in every urban mile and convenience stores and grocery stores in between just in case we need a little something in between stops. Have you ever hosted in your home someone from another country? Then you know the wide eyes that come with the run we make with them to the local King Soopers, Safeway, Sprouts, or on the grandest of all grand scales of abundance, to *Costco*. They simply can't get their heads around all the food and supplies from which we have to choose. They can't fathom how one store can actually feed the five thousand, and not with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish, either.

If we went into our kitchen and only found a few loaves of bread and two fish, we would feel deprived, understocked, like we were back in the college dormitory, like we were out of work out of money out of hope out of faith. Maybe some of us here today have known that hunger, that desperation, that question in the pit of your stomach, "How much bread do I need to feed my family? How will I get enough?"

Doris is a person living a life of quiet desperation. Her mother has died, and she has always lived with her mother. She explains that she just couldn't leave her mom to live alone in New York. Her brother and her sister are anxious to sell their mother's home and get the money

from the sale. This prospect terrifies Doris, not only because it means she will have to move, but because she has *treasures* in the house that she will have to give up. She has one ski that a neighbor gave her years ago. She has a broken vacuum and books stacked up in the corners of every room. Others question her, calling her a hoarder. They ask her, "Why do you need all this stuff? How much bread do you need?" They just don't understand how her treasures feed her.

Sally Fields embodies this life lived in quiet desperation. As Doris, she shows us what it might be like to live in fear of change. She breaks our heart as people make fun of how she dresses, what she values, and how she relates to others. She is an outcast. She is one of the nameless, faceless five thousand people on the hillside until Jesus comes along and decides to feed her, to show her what it is like to live not in a pattern of despair, but rather, in a Theology of Abundance.

This movie was rated R, and that is a travesty. If the rating might keep you away tonight, don't let it. It should have been rated PG. When I watched it again the other night, I kept waiting for what I must have missed the first time around that would earn it a "Restricted" rating. But I didn't miss a thing. No sex, no violence, no drugs, not much drinking, a little language, mostly from one character in a short scene.

But then again, all along maybe Doris' life was one big R rating- *Restricted*. When asked how she is doing after her mother's death,

she says, "I am supposed to hold up, so I'm holding up." She's supposed to go to the same job she has held for decades, dutifully taking the Staten Island Ferry each day to work, and so she does. She is supposed to keep to herself, so she does. She is supposed to take care of her mother's home, just as it has been all these years, and so she does.

That is, until the Jesus figure of the story, John Fremont, a kind and compassionate young handsome man enters her life and introduces her to a Theology of Abundance. When others in the work environment question why he has befriended her, for she is decidedly *not* hip, he explains quietly and thoughtfully, "She's definitely weird, but I don't know, she's like a good weird."

Doris becomes a disciple of John's, hanging on his every word, looking to him for approval, wanting to be close to him in ways even she doesn't understand, even stealing and treasuring his pencil notched with his teeth marks as a teenager holds onto a picture of her favorite rock star.

"How much bread do you have? Do you have what you need?" Doris follows a particular motivational speaker by the name of Willy Williams. He says to her, "Don't look back at your life and say why me? Look ahead and say why *not* me?" Jesus tells his disciples, who want him to shoo the five thousand away with a quick benediction

so that they can get supper for themselves and for him, "You do it. Fix supper for them."

Don't look back at your life, Doris, and ask, 'why me?' Don't look back at your life, Peter, James, John, Mary, and say 'why me?' Willy tells Doris, "You are perfect inside and out. You are a green ball of glowing light, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise. There are seven days in the week and Someday isn't one of them." Why not me?

How much bread do you need? Jesus says you have what you need. Now go feed the people! As Martin Copenhaver retells the story of the mass feeding, the disciples balk at this command from their Lord. They turn their pockets inside out and ask defiantly, "How are we supposed to feed all these people? We barely have enough for ourselves!" Jesus listens to this pity party for awhile, and then tells them, "Just give them what you have. I will supply the rest."

I love that theology. I love that assurance that says to me, just give them what you have, it is enough. Share the abundance. Share the love. God will provide the rest. It's about *faith*. It's about *trust*. It's about *trying*. It's about *giving*. It's about asking, "why not me?" Fundamentally, it's about the partnership that you already have with God of Your Understanding—God the Father or Mother, God as Jesus, God as Spirit, or however else you understand that sacred connection between you and that Great Thing Within You That Wants You to Live Your Own Miracle Story. Willy Williams says to his

audience, think of the word, 'Impossible' as really two other words, "I'm possible."

I'm possible. You have all the bread you need. "Close your eyes to see with the other eye," the great Sufi writer, Rumi, reminds us. Engage the holy with your heart. Engage the world with a Theology of Abundance. Engage your life with the knowing faith that God has given you everything already that you need to heal the world. You do what you can. God will supply the rest.

I invite you to join Doris tonight on her road to rebirth, to the reclaiming her life. Journey with her as she explores what it means to turn 'impossible' into 'I'm possible.' Five loaves. Two stinky fish. It's all we need.

May It Be So.