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Friday, July 23, 2021
Year B, Proper 12

2 Kings 4:42-44
Ephesians 3:14-21
John 6:1-21

“They shall eat and have some left”

- There is a running joke around my house, especially between me and my mom
 - It is about me, and my aversion to cooking ham
 - More to the point, it is about eating ham leftovers
 - Because it is certainly true when talking about ham, you “shall eat and have some left”
 - Normally I have no problems eating leftovers- not as a kid, and not now as an adult
 - I’d say half of my meals at home are leftovers from other meals we cooked
 - No problem.
 - But ham... ham is a different beast all its own
 - I remember my mom cooking big hams- maybe for Christmas, or even Thanksgiving if we wanted something other than turkey
 - Or just because the grocery store had it on sale and she knew it would feed two teenage boys for several meals
 - And that right there is the problem
 - The ham would last forever- after sliced ham, ham sandwiches, bbq chopped pork, the ham bone would end up in a soup!!
 - I am certain that every time my mom cooked a ham, we witnessed a miracle: it could also feed five thousand.
 - Jesus would be proud
 - When I was reading the lessons for today earlier this week, I skipped right over the miraculous part of feeding large groups with small amounts
 - And I noticed the leftovers: I thought, “They are going to be eating that for weeks!”

- With my initial, ungrateful attitude about leftovers, I realized that as I read these stories, I unconsciously saw myself as one of the ones eating
 - The one being the consumer, the receiver
- I think I may have missed the point
- These two miraculous feeding stories do invite us to project ourselves into them, but not as the ones eating
- Instead, I think we can better imagine ourselves as the ones giving the food, the young boy or the man from Baal-Shalisha
- Also, we can see ourselves as the one asking God to bless what gifts have been given
- From these stories we see what happens when God's faithfulness is combined with a willing heart
- As is the case frequently with our lectionary, these two readings are not paired accidentally
 - And when you have two readings such as these which play off of each other so well
 - You must take a look at where they are similar, and where they differ- you have to compare and contrast
 - When the gospel of John was written, you can safely assume that its author knew this story found in 2 Kings
 - Here a man comes from far away, Baal-SHAL-isha, and he brings the prophet Elisha his first fruits, his tithe
 - It is twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain
 - Already, we have some significant pieces of information
 - Baal-SHAL-isha is from a neighboring kingdom, one who mostly worships Baal¹, as indicated in its name
 - This man is faithful to YHWY, even when those around him are not.
 - He even travels a good distance to follow the Lord's commandment to tithe
 - The fact that this is his first fruits is also important- this is an act of faith
 - This man trusts that God will continue to provide more later so he can feed his family after making this gift²
 - Elisha, speaking on behalf of God, instructs the man to give his tithe to the hungry people- but there's a problem

¹ Karen C. Sapio, *Feasting on the Word, Year B Volume 3*, 269

² Stephen Edmondson, *Feasting on the Word, Year B Volume 3*, 268

- There is not enough food to go around.
- The man only sees what little he has to offer in the face of what seems like a larger need
- I wonder if he thought for a moment that since his gift was so small, that perhaps God could not use it
- Maybe it would be better if he took it somewhere else where he could be certain it could make a bigger impact
- The temptation to give into a mindset of scarcity is great.
- Instead, Elisha encourages him to just give faithfully, and let God workout the rest
- Elisha assures him that they will eat and even have some left.
- God takes that meager gift and uses it in ways the giver could not imagine
- Gifts given add up to more than their sum when God is blessing them
- And God proves God's faithfulness once again through the generous man and the prophet Elisha
- Fast forward almost 1000 years³ and we find another example of God's faithfulness, and the movement from scarcity to abundance
 - This time, Jesus is trying to teach the disciples the same lesson
 - A few things in this feeding story are different than before:
 - First, instead of a man who brings his tithe, we have a young boy who only has his lunch
 - I cannot help but wonder if there might have been other lunches in the crowd, but everyone else decides to remain silent
 - If they were to share, they might not have enough left to be filled- there just isn't enough to go around.
 - But this young boy raised his hand and offered what he had- he offered his lunch even before he thought about his own hunger
 - The progression from a tithing man to a naive and generous young boy I think echoes Jesus' admonition to have a child like faith
 - If we stop to consider just how scarce the resource seems, as so many adults do, and as the disciples were busy doing
 - We might not be willing to offer what little we have.
 - But child like faith, one of trust before fear, is what Jesus is able to use for this miracle, which finds itself in all four gospels

³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elisha>

- There are other differences: the need in this story has grown by fifty fold over Elisha's story
- Where there were 100 people, now there are 5,000
- The author of John estimates that it would take six months of wages to buy the food needed to feed everyone
- To make matters worse, the lunch offered was less food than Elisha had to work with
- But the generous heart was there, and the gift was offered
- Jesus gave thanks and blessed the food they had twelve baskets of food left over, rather than just "some left" like in the first story
- John has gone to great lengths to show that Jesus is greater, yet still connected to the prophets of old
- Bigger problem, less to work with, and a greater outcome.
- Together, Elisha and Jesus remind us that God still is making much of little
- And challenging us to leave a mindset of scarcity into a place of abundance. ⁴
- When you combine a willing and giving heart with God's faithfulness, I am afraid there will be enough left over to eat on for weeks!
 - I wish these readings had come up in November- they would have made for great stewardship lessons...
 - Because it does strike at the heart of our views on what is enough, and what is not
 - How much we have to give, our attitude in giving, and the challenge to give even when it seems we have so little to offer
 - I used to think that this applied mostly to our finances, but lately time seems to be just as precious and just as scarce
 - Today these readings challenge me- that my little tithe of time and treasure
 - Can be multiplied and used more effectively by God than I can ever imagine
 - I hope it does you too
 - It is a challenge to our mindset: a movement from scarcity to abundance
 - From "this will never be enough" to "I wonder what God will do with this"

⁴ <http://processandfaith.org/resources/lectionary-commentary/yearb/2012-07-29/proper-12>

- It seems to me that humans are usually very bad at estimating what God is capable of.
- The trajectory in these two stories is what really jumps out at me
- In the first story, God is able to feed 100.
- By the second 5000 (+ women and children)
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- While reading this parable as a miracle in which God through Jesus multiple the loaves and the fish is perfectly fine...
- More and more Biblical scholars see the true miracle as one in which Jesus' open heart and spiritual abundance encouraged others
- And while the young boy brought his fish and loaves forward, others were inspired to do the same
- And out popped the hidden lunches, the just in case snacks, the picnic baskets people had brought suddenly opened wide instead of being hidden
- That the true miracle here might have been that Jesus convinced very hungry people to share their food anyway.
- How is it that we too can move into fore faith, more abundance, and away from fear and scarcity?
- From apathy, to energized hope?
- I suppose, however, that the timing of these readings is not bad after all
 - As we near the beginning of our program year this September, I find our story as a church imbedded within these two stories
 - We are offering what we have with a generous heart, and God is using it
 - Perhaps in ways that St. Michael's has never had before- this year is a combination of so many factors- church looks different today
 - They come together to create a unique opportunity, a unique challenge.
 - We have our work cut out for us
 - My own mindset has shifted from what being a rector was like a couple of years ago
 - To today- can you believe that it has been almost five full years and we begin year 6 in September???
 - Today, it is more like a startup mentality than ever before is what I told the vestry
 - The church must reboot now. Some things will be similar, some things will not

- And very few things can run on auto-pilot anymore
- And we need you- all of you- to do this, to give of yourselves, to participate and be a part
- We need your excitement again, energy again, and a over-the-top warm welcome to anyone who walks in that door
- Each of us now ambassadors to a new/old church.
- We need our faith that God is right here with us
- I once heard someone say that, The church does not have a mission... God's mission has a church.
- Are you ready? Do you have your fish and loaves ready to share with heart full of abundance?
- We give, and God blesses, it grows
- I wonder what God will accomplish through our gifts and work this year....

Amen.