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Matthew 15:29-39
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What Do You Have?

Karen and I returned last night from Las Vegas where we saw U2 in the Sphere. Oh my goodness. It was like a spiritual experience. The music. The sound. The sights. Everything you wanted to engage your senses. And it felt like we were in this massive worship experience together. That is what U2's music does. It connects people to something greater than themselves. Much of their lyrics are unashamedly Christian without being blatantly Christian. Do you know what I mean? It was awesome. If you can get tickets during this last month of their performance go!

Last week, we focused on the question that Jesus asked as he called his first disciples, Andrew, Peter, James and John. What do you want? And we saw that God loves us so much that God cares about what we desire, what we long for, what we want.

And I shared that two things immediately came to mind for me were friendship and adventure.

Well God has answered that prayer for me. A new adventure.

Columbia Theological Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia has a program called The Preachers Studio for Renewal. It is partially funded by the Lily Foundation who generously provided a sabbatical grant for me a few years back,

They are offering "Holy Encounters: Preachers on Pilgrimage, A 2-week Spiritual Pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago." For those of us who don't know what the Camino de Santiago is, it is a centuries old 500 mile trek through the Pyrenees Mountains along border of France and Spain, continuing along the northern coastal region of Spain and then descending down to the town of Santiago de Compostella just north of Portugal. The trek ends at the Cathedral in Santiago where the bones of St. James, one of Jesus' first disciples, are supposedly buried.

This has been on my bucket list for many years.

I applied a couple of weeks ago and learned this past week, that I was accepted into the program. With sessions blessing, I will be gone on the pilgrimage from May 29 to June 12 with 15 other pastors from across the country. Karen and I will also take a few weeks beforehand to travel in Spain together and celebrate our 28th anniversary. I am so excited!

We will be hiking a 165 mile section along the northern coastal area, through the Basque country. We will have two guides with us. One guide is a preaching professor at Columbia Theological Seminary and the other is licensed counselor

and yoga instructor. In the mornings, we will start with a group devotion to inspire our thinking along the trail. In the evenings, we will gather as a group to process what bubbled up in our spirits as we walked and do some much needed restorative yoga. Did I say that I am so excited?

I am humbled that God answered my longing so quickly to Jesus' question, "What do you want," so quickly.

Today, we transition to yet another of Jesus' questions. This time it has to do more with possessions. Not what do you want that you don't have. Rather what do you have? It's a question that causes the disciples to challenge their own misperceptions of scarcity that often plague us.

The scripture story comes from Gospel of Matthew where Jesus and his disciples had been traveling throughout the region of Tyre and Sidon. As they came to rest along the Sea of Galilee, large crowds followed him. This must have been a remote place, without a lot of towns nearby which then prompted Jesus to question his disciples.

Please join me as we read from Matthew 15:29-39.

29 Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down. **30** Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. **31** The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.

32 Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way."

33 His disciples answered, "Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?"

34 "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked.

"Seven," they replied, "and a few small fish."

35 He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. **36** Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people. **37** They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. **38** The number of those who ate was four thousand men, besides women and children. **39** After Jesus had sent the crowd away, he got into the boat and went to the vicinity of Magadan.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

I remember when Karen and I purchased our first home. A very small three bedroom home in Woodinville, Washington. We paid \$169,000 for it. We were both young professionals with decent jobs. But we still wondered how will we have enough money to buy this home? We scraped together what we could and then God provided just what we needed.

Before our first child was born, Karen had decided to leave her job to stay home with our baby when I was very unexpectedly laid off from my job. And we thought, how will we have enough money to stay in our home and provide for our new daughter? With unemployment, doing odd jobs, a few unexpected gifts, and starting a new business, God provided just what we needed.

A few years later, now with three young children under the age of 5, God called us to leave our home, travel across country, and begin seminary. And we thought, how will we be able to afford school while taking care of our young family without becoming crippled by too much school debt? Through scholarships, extreme generosity of our home church, Sammamish Presbyterian Church, who paid for our housing for three years, doing some very odd jobs, and taking advantage of the PC (USA) seminary debt forgiveness program that encouraged new pastors to consider calls in smaller churches like Cascades, God provided just what we needed. I was able to accept the call here without having to worry about how I would pay off my student debt.

Are we starting to see a pattern?

What began with mindset of scarcity...will we have enough to do what we feel called to do? And then ending with amazement at God's abundance in what God miraculously provides.

That's exactly what happens in our story today.

Thousands of people had come to follow Jesus in this remote setting. Mind you these are not people who have a lot of resources at their disposal. People can't walk. Some were blind. Others were unable to speak. And they were brought by loved ones who desperately needed Jesus do for them what they couldn't do themselves. They were needy.

But they heard of someone who did have what it took. Jesus, and he healed them. The mute were speaking. The crippled were made well. The lame were walking. And the blind could see. And they praised God for it.

Jesus was doing all sorts of miraculous signs and wonders before their very eyes. Even before his disciples' eyes. And yet when Jesus turned around and asked them to participate in something miraculous, they were short sighted.

Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry; or they may collapse on the way."

And the disciples answered, “Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?”

There is that word...enough.

Interestingly but the word “enough” is not even in the original Greek translation. It is implied and inserted by the translator. That’s why we need to come to the text with a sense of humility and openness to what the printed words actually say.

If we were to translate it literally word for word, in the Greek, it would read, “And saying to him, the disciples, from where to us in a secluded place loaves so many as to satisfy so great a crowd?” There’s not even a conjugated verb in the sentence.

Yet the sense of the text, which sometimes we need to insert to help us understand it more clearly, implied their statement of there not being enough bread for everyone.

The disciples’ question is one of pragmatism which is an approach that assesses the truth of theories or beliefs in terms of success of their practical applications. Pragmatists solve problems using human understanding. Do we have any self-avowed pragmatists in the room? You are important parts of the equation. You help us see things as they are, without rose colored glasses. And you get things done when it is within your capacity to do so!

Idealists, on the other hand, like myself, can sometimes drive you crazy. We tend to look beyond human understanding and what is within our capacity to do something. Idealists often don’t see things as they are, but as we wished or hoped they would be. But idealists are the other part of the equation. While pragmatists can help us assess where we are starting from. Idealists can push pragmatists into realms where they are not comfortable. Mysterious realms. Where we can’t figure it out on our own, but somehow God simply comes through and provides what we need.

Both go hand in hand, like ying and yang.

The disciples responded to Jesus’ call to feed the thousands with pragmatism. “Jesus. There are thousands of people out here. It is a remote place. There isn’t a bakery for miles where we could get enough bread to feed all these people.” Ok, they properly assessed their situation correctly. Jesus could have said, “Yeah, I guess I was too idealistic and hopeful that maybe we could do something. Never mind.”

But instead, we see how he pushes the pragmatists by not answering their question. That would have been easy. Right? Just give them the answer. “Oh just walk five miles to such and such a town, and Jimmy the baker will make all the bread you need. Go buy it and bring it back here.”

We know however, that Jesus was forty times more likely to ask a follow up question than to provide a direct answer.

So what does Jesus do?

He asks them another question.

Let us remember, whenever Jesus asks a question, it is never because he doesn't know the answer to it. He asks to see if we know the answer to his question.

“What do you have?”

You see his question forces them to look deep within themselves to consider what resources they already had...that if they offered them to God's service of feeding these desperate people, that maybe, just maybe, God might miraculously multiply those resources in the same way that Jesus had miraculously healed so many people.

“Seven loaves of bread and a few small fish,” they replied.

From a human perspective, that would not even make a drop in the bucket!

And still Jesus took them. Blessed them. Divided them. Had the crowd sit down on the ground. And then gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. Everyone ate till they were satisfied. Over four thousand men, not included the women and children. And then afterwards, the disciple picked up seven basketfuls of bread left over.

How many loaves did they start with? Seven.

How many basketfuls were left over? Seven.

Seven in scripture is always a symbol of perfection. God's provision is always perfect. It is always more than enough.

And when we willingly offer God's provision back to God to be put in God's service, God multiplies those resources and makes them even more.

Author Martin Copenhaver in his book *Jesus is the Question* recounts a story about Mother Theresa of Calcutta and how she began her orphanage. “She told her superiors, ‘I have three pennies and a dream from God to build an orphanage.’”

Her superiors chided her: ‘You can't build an orphanage with three pennies... With three pennies you can't do anything.’

‘I know,’ she said, with a sly smile, ‘but with God and three pennies I can do anything.’”¹

Let me close by telling you another story of how our Benevolence Board came to be. I was sharing with a friend about how Cascades was serving under-resourced families at Silver Star Elementary School just down the road. And he said, “Wow that's really great. Could you use some more money to do that?” Of course, I said “Yes.” So he wrote a check for \$5,000. A little while later he asked,

¹ Martin B. Copenhaver, *Jesus is the Question, The 307 Questions Jesus Asked and the 3 He Answered* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), 84-85.

could you use some more more. To which I said, “Yes!” So he wrote a check for \$10,000.

Some months later, he asked if we could have coffee. At that meeting he asked me “How big could you scale what you are doing at Silver Star to include other schools in our community?” So I asked in return, “How big were you thinking?”

I kid you not, he opened his check book, right then and there in the coffee shop, and wrote a check for \$100,000.

That was in 2017 and since that date Cascades has been blessed to channel over \$647,626 to under resource families, low income schools, and the non profits who serve them and the homeless in Clark County. And more resources are coming soon for this year!

I share that not as a sense of pride, “Look at us.” But to say, “Wow, look at what God can do!” I am deeply humbled that we are so privileged to share these resources with people who need them most.

Sometimes I think we are so overwhelmed by the size of the task before us that we think we need to bite off the entire thing in one bite, by ourselves. And so we do nothing and miss out on the opportunity to be part of God’s work in our world.

What if instead, we reframed our thinking and began with “What do we have?” What if we offered what little we do have to give, and let God multiply those gifts for God’s kingdom purposes?

If we are concerned that we don’t have enough resources to solve the homeless problem in Clark County, what could God do with a few hours of time at Family Promise of Clark County on a Saturday?

If we think we could not even begin giving a full 10% tithe, could we start with 1% and then let it grow as our ability grows?

If we think we could not provide an entire meal for someone in need, could we bake some cookies to go with that meal?

If we don’t think we could spare an hour out of our day for prayer, could we start with 5 or 10 minutes?

It all starts with question.

A simple question that Jesus asks of each of us today.

What do you have?

As we transition into a time of Communion together, an outsider, looking in at what we are about to do this morning, might say, “Oh this is nothing but a tiny snack consisting of a small piece of bread and little bit of juice. That wouldn’t even come close to satisfy this many people.”

But to we who believe that Jesus is the Son of God, who miraculously made the cripple well, the lame walk, the blind see, and fed thousands of people from

very little, this meal means so much more. Not only does Jesus satisfy our hunger, but he spiritually equips us for the journey that lies ahead.

This isn't just a snack of bread and juice, my friends. It is spiritually Jesus' body and blood. As we eat them, we take Jesus in. He is in us, and we are in him. We are one, just as Jesus and the Father are one. It's a unity that comes by faith, nothing else but sheer blind faith.

So may we consider what we do have to offer in answer to Jesus' question. May we not be paralyzed with fear facing the enormity of the ask. May we offer those gifts to Jesus for God's purposes in the world. And may we sit back and be amazed as God does even more than we had ever imagined.

Amen.