

*Lectionary 17*

July 29, 2018

Sermon by Pastor Cindy Bullock

The Holy Gospel according to Saint John. (John 6: 1-21)

Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat? He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

The Gospel of our Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

There are twenty-four days, twenty hours, and about forty minutes until the great Minnesota Get Together starts! And I get nothing. Let me try that again. There are twenty-four days, twenty hours, and about forty minutes until the great Minnesota Get Together starts!

RESPONSE: Yeah!

The best thing about the State Fair is that it is a study in abundance – so much to see, so much to hear, so much to eat. Say what you will about crowds, or parking, or fried things on a stick. Abundance is the theme of the State Fair. It's about more than enough. There is no way you could possibly see it all, or do it all, or eat it all.

Such wild abundance does something to us. It removes the point of competing. Why run to be first to see the pigs when the pigs are there all day, just waiting for you? Why go early in the morning to grab Sweet Martha's cookies, when you know that they are going to be plenty of them that afternoon, when you really want them? Abundance encourages us to slow down. It causes us to loosen up a little. Let that clenched feeling go away, because we don't have to fight to see it. We don't have to compete to get to it.

I have a friend who goes every year for a full day – like from the time it opens until the fireworks at night. And she says, "I just walk a little, sit a little, and look a little and sit a little, and eat a little, and sit a little. No hurry. Just taking it all in."

Abundance. Abundance calls us into a posture of receiving. It's easy-going, open, kind. So much of our life is about competition, about getting there first, about not enough. So I am going to invite you for a few minutes this morning into a posture of receiving. Just open your hands for a moment. It feels a little weird, doesn't it? It's kind of vulnerable to not control what's coming. I invite you into this posture of receiving while I read some parts of Psalm 145, our psalm for this morning. This psalm is a study in abundance.

*"All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord."*

*"The Lord is gracious in all God's deeds."*

*"God raises up all who are bowed down."*

*"The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season."*

*"You satisfy the desire of every living thing."*

*"The Lord is kind in all God's doings."*

*"The Lord is near to all who call."*

"All." "Every." The words "all" and "every" occur fourteen times in nine verses. This is significant. This is about wide-ranging, overflowing gifts of God. If this is true, and the Psalm speaks the truth about the world and about God, then abundance is about far more than the State Fair. Abundance is about all of life. We live in the midst of abundance.

It doesn't seem that way, does it? Life is more complex than God swooping in and giving us everything we need. It's easy enough to talk about God and abundance in church. Right? But then there is the real world.

Abundance, but – What about food deserts and hungry children?

Abundance, but – What about the complexity of health care and how it can be provided?

Abundance, but – What about shortages of teachers and supplies and schools that don't live up to expectations?

Abundance, but – What about issues of immigration and what types of limits can a nation claim?

Abundance, but – What about time? Good gracious, there is never enough time.

Going to church and going to the State Fair are fine for a little bit of time away. But we live in the real world. Right?

We are followers of Jesus Christ. And Jesus teaches that abundance is the real world. And we live in the illusion of scarcity. Jesus teaches that this (open hands) is the posture of the real world, and this (clenched fist) is an illusion. Can I have an "Amen" on that?

RESPONSE: Amen.

Oh, come on. Can I have an "Amen" on that?

RESPONSE: AMEN!

Thank you.

In today's Gospel, we see Jesus enacting what is real. There is something in this scripture so vital, so real. This story is so important that all four gospels tell it. It is the only miracle, other than the resurrection, that appears in all four gospels. In fact, this story is so important it appears six times in four gospels. Matthew and Mark are so excited about it, they tell about it twice, in case we missed it the first time.

The story goes like this, and this is John's telling: Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. He looked up and saw a crowd coming toward him. Philip automatically goes into (clenched fist) scarcity mode. "It would take six-months salary to feed all those people." Six-months salary. Whose salary is he talking about? His salary. It would take six months of his salary to feed them. Philip looks at the crowd and says, "I don't have enough. I cannot take care of this. I want to be faithful, I want to be generous, – but." Abundance – but. "Let's be reasonable." "No outcomes." "Plan for return on investment." "Stay in control." "I don't have enough."

Next we hear from Andrew. And Andrew is trying to see the world in a new way, trying to trust in God's abundance, but it's hard. I think that's where most of us are. We are trying, but it's hard. We know we are beloved by God. We know God is a God of abundance. But we get caught up in this "not enough." We want to believe, but it's hard.

And then Jesus doesn't answer either one of them. He doesn't correct them or argue with them, or even roll his eyes at them. Jesus just acts out of what is real. He knows what is real. He knows his followers are trapped in scarcity and competition. Even with what they've seen and the miracles they've been a part of. Even with all we've seen and the miracles we've been a part of, we still fall into the trap of "not enough." Jesus doesn't say anything to them, doesn't say anything to us. He just invites five thousand people to lunch.

Jesus gives them the food. It is God who gives. "*The eyes of all look to you and you give them their food in due season.*" "*You satisfy the desire of every living thing.*" "*The Lord is kind in all of God's doings.*" God works through us, with us, among us. But it is God who gives abundance. Philip was scared that he had to give it all, that he had to do it all. Andrew was embarrassed with what he had just wasn't enough. But it is Jesus who gives. And Jesus always gives. And there was enough.

After everyone ate, Jesus didn't look around to see if people had enough or if there were leftovers. He just said, "Gather up the surplus." He knew there was abundance. Jesus didn't ask. The gospel writers don't ask. They just assume God gives. They assume the posture of open hands, to give and receive. Sharing the abundance.

I read an article this week in the *L.A. Times* about Massimo Bottura. He is an Italian chef who runs a restaurant in Italy, a restaurant that has three Michelin stars – the highest rating you can get. It is considered one of the top five restaurants in the world. But this man also founded a nonprofit called "*Food for the Soul.*" This nonprofit creates soup kitchens, first in Italy, and then in cities all over the world. And these are not just any kind of soup kitchen. He invites high-profile chefs to join volunteers to serve people in poverty at communal tables, the table service. These amazing and creative people. And the rule is this: The meals are created with surplus food from restaurants or supermarkets. It has to be salvaged food. For example, he said he was able to feed over a hundred people a day from the excess meat from one supermarket. The article pointed out that every day we produce enough food to feed twelve billion – that's with a "b" – billion people, and one-third of that food is thrown away. At the same time, almost a billion remain undernourished.<sup>1</sup> Bottura is teaching us how to find abundance right among us. I saw him on Jimmy Kimmel taking stuff out of the writers' refrigerator, and out of the half-dead junk created a beautiful meal out of it. There is abundance everywhere we look.

How do we begin to go from this (clenched fists) to this (open hands)? How do we begin to see the real world of plenty and wonder, not one of competition and fear? How do we begin to live in a world where five thousand are fed, and children have enough, and we easily share, and we can creatively use the abundance for everyone. It takes practice. It is a journey.

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<sup>1</sup> Noelle Carter, "What happens when one of the world's best chefs cleans out your fridge." May 4, 2017 <http://www.latimes.com/food/dailydish/la-fo-qa-massimo-bottura-food-waste-tips-20170508-htmlstory.html#>

So, homework. I haven't done this in a while. I'm going to give you homework.

I invite you to spend a week with Psalm 145. Take your bulletin home – part of it is printed in there – or you can find it on your online Bible or your Bible at home. Spend a week with Psalm 145. Stick it on your refrigerator, your mirror, put it in your briefcase. And every time you read this wonderful psalm of abundance and thanksgiving, pray. Pray that God will teach you to see the plenty that is around us. Pray that you might learn to trust in God's abundance.

Sit with this psalm, learn from this psalm, rest in this psalm. Let your hands be opened by it, as Jesus teaches us all that abundance is real.

Amen.