

Making 'Enough'  
Exodus 16 selected verses (2-3, 11-21, 31), Luke 9:10-17  
August 4, 2019, St. Paul's UCC, Madrid

As we move into our time of reflecting on God's Word I want to invite you to begin by gently letting your attention gather around your heart. You may want to close your eyes or lightly touch your chest. Maybe that helps you find the silent space within that radiates from the heart. Don't force it or fret if this makes no sense at all or seems a silly way to begin a sermon. Just open to the ancient knowing that our physical heart is the place where we connect with God, the Creative Mystery whose Word calls worlds into being. In our singing we just asked the Fount of Every Blessing to tune our hearts to sing God's grace. May it be so as we ponder our Word for today.

Now if you want to keep your attention resting on your heart and completely ignore what I have to say, I'm really okay with that. Otherwise open your eyes but see if you can listen with the ears of your heart. I'm saying this because I feel it's the only way to really enter today's scriptures. Our minds struggle to know what to do with them. But our hearts...oh my, here we too are fed.

Both passages move us into the gracious realm of God's economy *where needs draw resources*. Both are set in deserted places that seem devoid of the resources that are needed for even the most basic of needs. The wilderness of Exodus is harsh— empty and dangerous—and the fear of scarcity causes the Israelites to look back on slavery in Egypt as 'the good old days'. But in this story the wilderness is transformed into a place that is not empty, but full. Full of God's Presence. It is all holy ground. May the eyes of our hearts come to know this Presence in these challenging wilderness times in which we ourselves live.

In Egypt the Israelites ate their fill, but it was the bread of affliction. They were oppressed by a system that used them for its own ends and fed them to keep their bodies strong for the labor into which they were forced. In the wilderness they are nourished by something strange and new. They call it manna, which in their language means, "What is it?" I love that. Morning by morning they gather this strange bread from heaven, this bread of freedom and transformation, never pinning it down with a name that would take away its strange wonder. May we look through such eyes at the wonders of Creation that gather to feed and nourish us still.

This passage teaches us one of the lessons most relevant in our world today...the lesson of 'enough', which has everything to do with the abundance we can know in our hearts and little to

do with the math we do in our heads. Morning by morning 'enough' is provided so that everyone's need is met. There are no 'haves' and 'have nots'. Those who hoard end up with a wormy, stinking mess. The Israelites can do nothing but trust that God will provide.

Someone once asked John D. Rockefeller, "How much is 'enough'?" His answer? "Just a little more than what I have."

On the other hand, the story is told of a monastery visited by a person of great wealth. She was touched by the monk's simple existence and wanted to do something to brighten their days. So she went to the abbot and offered a generous gift of money for the monks to use as they wished. The abbot thanked her but said that they had everything they needed. Still she insisted and so he agreed to put a basket at the back of the chapel, inviting the monks to take whatever they wanted. She would receive back whatever was left. When the money was counted at the end of the next day it was found that not a penny had been taken.

Lao Tzu tells us, "If you realize that you have enough, then you are truly rich." I quoted that to Roberto, our Mayan host, when a group of us visited small farmers in the mountains of Guatemala several years ago. I told him that meeting these farmers who are living vibrant lives with so very much less than what we have, taught me that I do indeed have enough, and certainly enough to share. "Visiting this community," I said, "has made me rich."

Roberto replied, "In our culture we have a word, *Kuchub'al* which means that everyone pitches in. You bring what you have, and take only what you need. In this we see the hand of God."

I find in this indigenous wisdom a doorway into today's story of the feeding of the multitude. Of all the stories of Jesus' miracles, this one alone appears in all four gospels. That speaks to its importance to the early church in their understanding of who Jesus is... and who we are called to be as his followers.

I have long been fascinated with this story, and have read it with rapt attention, looking for a clue as to just when this miraculous multiplication occurred. Did the loaves and fish multiply as Jesus blessed them? Or was it in the hands of the disciples? Were mountains of bread created, or did it all happen almost imperceptibly, so that as each person in the hungry crowd took only what was needed and passed on the rest, it added up to plenty, with some left over?

Today Jesus teaches us that 'enough' is not simply something we have, but something that we make together, when we take whatever is in our hands, bless it, break it, and share it freely. Like loaves and fish in the hands of Jesus and the disciples and the crowd, there is a silent miracle that happens somewhere along the line, whereby there are no more 'haves' and 'have nots'. Everyone is filled, and there is more left over than there was when we began.

That lesson goes to the heart of the social and environmental ills that seem intractable in our day. Gus Speth has spent a long career defending the Earth and calling us to be its good stewards. "I used to think the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change," he says. "I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address those problems. But I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy...and to deal with those we need a spiritual and cultural transformation... and we scientists don't know how to do that."

But people of faith around the world have sacred texts that can transform us if we truly invite them to do so. If we read scripture deeply, listening with the ears of our hearts and allowing the Holy One to shape our lives, we will bear witness in our culture to what is possible with God. Indigenous wisdom is still lived out among many peoples; graced with humility, we can learn so very much from them.

We may scoff and say, "All that will never heal what ails today's world", and saying that does indeed make it so... but only for the one who says it.

There are others who, day by day, are living a bit more fully into what Charles Eisenstein calls 'the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible'. They are finding more and more ways to make simple choices that don't increase their bondage to an economy other than God's as they seek to diminish their participation in the voracious consumption that is devouring Earth's gifts at an unsustainable pace. They are choosing the common good as the lode star to give direction to their lives, knowing that we are all connected and that all flourishing is thus mutual. They understand that, whatever others do, integrity calls us to do what our hearts know is right, not knowing what the fruits of our actions may be. They are waking up to how profoundly sacred Creation is and seeking to walk lightly, with love and joy, embraced by a universe they experience as benevolent. They understand that if God's economy in which needs draw resources is not working, it is not because of God, but because we have not yet learned to weave a world that works for us all.

When we pray together as Jesus taught, we begin by saying "Our Father," not "My Father." We pray for God to feed, forgive and deliver us, not one by one, but as a people. Our faith finds its center in another story of Jesus taking bread, blessing and breaking it and giving it to his disciples, saying, "This is my body, broken for you." Offering himself as the bread of life which can feed and transform us still, for as we eat at Christ's table we ourselves become Christ's body in this age... blessed, broken and given for a world that is hungry still.

May we rejoice in being that body together, that in an age of want we might sing of the vision of the day when sharing by all will mean scarcity for none. May our eyes be opened that we might recognize the Risen Christ in our midst, that in an age of individualism we might know the Presence that makes us one. May we go forth assured, so that when Jesus says to us, "You give them something to eat," we may do so, with faith in the abundance our life together lets us offer.

May it be so. Amen.