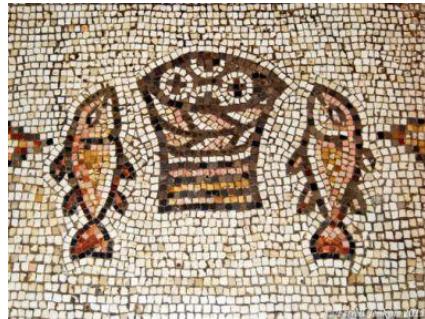


“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish? But what are they among so many people?” (John 6).



This question posed by Simon Andrew seems like a reasonable one. Thousands of hungry people who have been following Jesus like the star-crazed paparazzi, are now gathered in front of this “prophet” and his followers with empty stomachs, expecting to be fed. Miles away from any possible food source, Simon Andrew spies a young boy in possession a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish. I can just picture this worldly-wise disciple trying to use the nameless boy as an illustration for why they can’t possibly feed so many. Five thousand starving people and all we have is a boy with meager portions of bread and fish? Come on Jesus, this talk of God and His abundance is nice, but this is the REAL world. Bread and fish don’t just grow on trees.

I suppose Jesus could have gotten into a theological argument with Simon Andrew about trusting God’s ability to bring abundance out of scarcity. But instead, without speaking a word, Jesus goes over to the child, takes the bread and fish, gives thanks and feeds 5,000 souls. That’s it! End of story. Except that it’s not really the end of the story, is it?

What the gospel of John tells us more than any other gospel, is that when Jesus gets involved in things, abundance happens! Just look at what he does with some water jugs at a wedding back at Cana in Galilee. 180 gallons of the finest wine comes out of those ordinary water jugs, courtesy of Jesus. You’d think that Simon Andrew would have remembered that sign of abundance before spouting his old tired talk of scarcity.

So, here’s my question to you. (*and I honestly believe our ministry hinges on how we answer this question*): Is Jesus capable of using our gifts, as inadequate as we may think they are, to bless and feed the world? Think about it. An ordinary nameless child, weak and vulnerable to a dangerous world around him, catches Jesus’ attention and has his gifts multiplied to feed thousands. Jesus doesn’t just provide a “matching gift,” he multiplies the bread and fish to feed thousands with an abundance of leftovers. Oh, and a quick aside about that bread? Barley bread was the bread eaten by the most impoverished because of its relative cheapness. It was cheap because barley was not the bread ingredient of choice. It was tougher to grind than wheat, often times resulting in stones from the pestle being broken off and baked into the bread. It wasn’t uncommon to chip or lose a tooth just by the act of biting into a piece of barley bread.

But even this substandard bread is blessed by Jesus to feed in abundance! If Jesus can use these gifts offered by this young, anonymous and powerless child, Jesus can use your gifts as well. I imagine that boy learned at an early age that he had nothing of value to add to the world; but apparently Jesus disagreed.

This young nameless child on a Galilean hillside was not junk in Jesus' eyes, and neither are you. Whatever it is that you bring to ministry is not only gathered and used by Jesus, but it is treasured by him as well. If you don't believe me, just look what he does with the boy's gifts before feeding the crowd; he gives thanks for them. Yes, Jesus himself gives thanks for these gifts. If he can give thanks for a couple of fish and some barley bread, he can give thanks for your gifts as well.

This past year has ravaged our world and our city in ways never imagined possible. It has even taken its toll on us. But now more than ever, as we seek to safely venture back together in-person again as well as into our city, your gifts that you bring to ministry are noticed, blessed, and treasured by God. May the reality of Jesus bringing abundance out of scarcity not only challenge us to stay involved in the pain and brokenness of the world, but comfort us as well knowing that in the midst of it all, Jesus gives thanks to God for you! I know I certainly do.

Peace and Love,
Pastor Doug