

John 6:1-14

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ²A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵When 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?" ⁶He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." ⁸One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" ¹⁰Jesus 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. ¹¹Then 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. ¹²When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." ¹³So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. ¹⁴When 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."

Have you ever reflected about whether you live your life out of scarcity or out of a sense of God's great abundance? I've lived much of my life with a sense of scarcity. I don't think I even had a word for it until 10 years ago. But looking back now, I can see that this was not part of my innate personality or how God's desire for my life, and yet, I can see how scarcity ruled my life and relationships.

I am the youngest of six children. When I was a year old, my father sustained two successive heart attacks. He was only 50 years old. He went on to develop prostate cancer, along with a forced retirement from Weyerhaeuser. After 35 years on the payroll, his retirement was less than \$200 a month. Try feeding a family of eight on that. While my dad went in and out of the hospital, my mom went on the road selling Avon, Cutco knives, and Amway. My died dad the year I turned 12. If it wasn't for people from my church dropping groceries off on our doorstep, I may have ended up in foster care. The Methodist church literally became our personal food bank.

So – I grew up with a sense of scarcity. Not only scarcity of economic resources, but scarcity of emotional security and love as well. The messages I received was there wasn't going to be enough for me, even in the midst of receiving the message that God loved me and would provide for me.

It wasn't until I went on a six-week mission trip to Jamaica, at the age of 20, did I realize there was another way to approach life. I lived among people with few economic opportunities and material goods. And yet, there was a prevailing sense of generosity. I was naïve. I just knew I was going to bring God's love and change hearts for Jesus. I was going to impact their lives. I was going to make a difference. What I discovered was more than a little humbling. My heart was transformed by the graciousness of their faith. They offered me abundance in the midst of their material poverty, for they gave the gift of themselves. I realized that I needed to turn my narrow focus of scarcity in my life, and recognize and be grateful for the gift of God's abundance.

This is the lens through which I want to bring the gospel story of the feeding of the 5000. Do you know this is the only miracle story that appears in all four gospels? And when a story shows

up in all four gospels, it is a reason to pay close attention to what is going on. In the synoptic gospels – Matthew, Mark & Luke, it is growing late in a very remote place, and the disciples realize that the crowds are hungry. They tell Jesus: “*Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages to find food and lodging because we are in a remote place.*” They don’t want to have to deal with the hungry masses. But the response Jesus offers is, “Don’t send them away. You give them something to eat.” In the gospel of John, Jesus himself brings up the question of the hungry crowd: “*Where are we going to buy bread for these people to eat.*” In Matthew, Mark & Luke, the disciples come up with 5 loaves & 2 fish. It is only in the Gospel of John that we see a young child offering up his lunch. The disciples look at those meager resources, and a sense of scarcity sets in. They want people to fend for themselves. They are incredulous. Jesus is expecting them to feed them. They must have looked at Jesus rolling their eyes thinking, “Who are you kidding!”

I want to explain what happens to our psychological core and subsequently our actions when scarcity sets in upon us at any time in our lives. There are two cycles we can be a part of – Negative cycle (Scarcity) or positive cycle (abundance).

Action			Feelings
Cooperation	>>>	>>>	Abundance
	Conflict	Fear	
	Selfishness	Scarcity	
Sharing	<<<	<<<	Love

Fear is the driving force underneath scarcity thinking. Fear measures scarcity carefully and says that there is never enough, and certainly not enough for everyone. Fear makes us feel like we're sinking, sinking in debt, sinking in despair, sinking in depression and loss. Fear makes us grab onto the wrong things to protect us. *Fear* leads to *Selfishness* creates *Social Conflict* produces *Scarcity* > reinforces *Fear*.

Fear makes us arm ourselves and then miss the hand that is held out to us, telling us not to fear, not to struggle, but to recognize that God is God, and we are not. The voice telling us we can float, in trust, on top of the water, relaxing, as Kierkegaard said, on the buoyancy of God.

Compassion inspires *Sharing*, creating *Cooperation* > generates *Abundant Provision* > reinforces *Love* & compassion.

No individual can control the mood of society as a whole, so everyone is responsible for it in part. Whether we live from the perspective of scarcity or abundance influences & directly affect our lives each day, and we have a choice about how to respond. One of the key factors that determines how altruistically we behave is whether we see ourselves as living in a world of abundance or scarcity - whether we are motivated by love or by fear.

There are cyclical patterns of interactions between an individual and society.

Individuals' actions create the activity of society as a whole. >>> The activities within a society shape the social climate. >>> The social climate affects the mood of individuals. >>> The moods of individuals influence their actions.

It is fairly clear in this story that Jesus was operating from a paradigm of abundance; the disciples from scarcity. Of course if I was hanging out with Jesus, the disciples, and the crowd, I definitely would be operating out of paradigm of scarcity.

Much of the time our faith mirrors the disciples, of Philip and Andrew, who could not see past the six months' wages or the meager five loaves and two fish. The disciples of Jesus were overwhelmed by the need before them. If they didn't feel a responsibility to meet that need, Jesus certainly raised their consciousness. They tried to assess the situation, measure their resources, and figure out a solution, but they seemed to feel powerless in the face of so many hungry people. We, too, tend to base our living on our own scarcity or even on our own fears of insufficiency. So we hoard and save and worry and end up living life in small and safe measures. We pull back when we should push forward. We give in to our fear of a shortfall rather than exercising faith in God's abundance. But Christians are constantly on call to go places where we have never been, to do things that we have never attempted and to be things we have never envisioned.

This is a story of "Everybody Fed". No one going away hungry. And the story continues to have relevance for our lives today. Where we are called to be part of the story where everyone is fed. We are part of the story of Everybody Fed as some of us come to prepare a meal to serve at Tent City this afternoon. We are a part of the story of Everybody Fed as we volunteer the first three Wednesday evenings in September at Sand Point Housing so people can receive some basic supplies to live. We are part of the story of Everybody Fed whenever we work for justice to erase poverty.

The story is not just about food, and everyone having enough to eat. Currently there is a national debate raging over health care. I imagine Jesus would say the same thing to us today as well. "Don't send them away. They are sick. They need to be healed. You care for them." When Jesus approached the man at the pool of Bethsaida, I don't think he asked for his insurance card before the man could be healed.

The nature of health care has changed substantially since biblical times, but the importance of health care has remained the same. From our earliest days United Methodists have believed that providing health care to others is an important duty of Christians. John Wesley found ways to offer medical services at no cost to the poor in London. The first Methodist Social Creed (adopted in 1908) urged working conditions to safeguard the health of workers and community. The United Methodist Church in its Social Principles regards healthcare as a basic human right, as well as a responsibility both public and private. As the position of the Church elaborates: "We encourage individuals to pursue a healthy lifestyle and ... also recognize the role of governments in ensuring the each individual has access to those elements necessary to good health." Consistent with the Social Principles and *Book of Resolutions*, the General Board of Church and Society advocates for health care as a human right that must be made available to all.

One other aspect of the story: In the gospels of Mark & Luke, Jesus does a curious thing. He instructs the disciples to put the crowd into groups of 50-100 people. Why did it matter if people were in small groups or not? Jesus gathers the faceless crowd of 500 into a more intimate setting – from face to face, to name to name, to heart to heart. I can't imagine everyone new each other, liked one another, had the same theological or political beliefs. But I can imagine that something happened when they gathered in smaller groups. What once was a collection of isolated individual strangers becomes an interacting, connected community. And community is the context in which abundance replaces scarcity. Perhaps the people, gathered in smaller groups, no longer looking upon one another as strangers, found themselves moved to emulate the generosity of Jesus, rather than hoard their scarce resources. The same phenomenon can and does happen in church. For whatever reason we are lumped together in one worshipping community of faith, and we become familiar with one another – across our

theological, political, and other divisions we might encounter. I know that I am more inclined to help someone I have a relationship with, than the nameless faceless people in my life.

Somewhere along the way, we may begin to accept one another, and reach across the aisle. I read a story in Time magazine this week about something hopeful happening in the Senate – the article was about John Kerry. Teddy Kennedy realizes he doesn't have much time left to make a difference, and the article states that he is worried about John Kerry's legacy. Quote article...

Do we live in a world of abundance where we believe in our heart of hearts that there is enough to go around – enough food, enough resources, enough love?

Or do we live in a world marked by scarcity, a world where we are really not sure if sharing is such a good idea because it might leave us without enough? It is not that we need a lot more; we just want to have a little more to ensure that we will be satisfied.

We can apply this lesson to the life of our congregation. What are our expectations for our shared life? What hope do we have in spite of perceived shortage and scarcity? The miracle asks the question, "Do we believe God will provide what we need to do the ministry God wants done?" God simply asks us "What do you have?" and then invites us to offer only that - that which we already have to offer. No more than that. What would happen if we trusted in the power of God to multiply in amazing ways the resources we have, and what would happen if we saw this as a communal question, not simply a personal one? What if we looked around and saw the extravagant generosity with which God has provided an abundance for us all, and marveled at this great wonder? Would we be moved to be part of a dazzling work of God to re-create our shared life in justice and compassion?
