

Natalie Bell
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Always Abundance
Luke 9:10-17

On their return the apostles told Jesus^[c] all they had done. He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida. ¹¹ When the crowds found out about it, they followed him; and he welcomed them, and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed to be cured.

¹² The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, “Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place.” ¹³ But he said to them, “You give them something to eat.” They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” ¹⁴ For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, “Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” ¹⁵ They did so and made them all sit down.

¹⁶ And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. ¹⁷ And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

The feeding of the 5,000 is such an important story that each of the *four gospels* tells it.

Apparently, it’s a story we are supposed to remember, with a lesson we need to hear again and again!

And this story is *bookended* with stories of Jesus sending out his followers—to share the gospel, and heal the sick,

And he tells them to go *without taking anything with them* for their journey!

No money, no extra clothes....

Isn’t that interesting?

It’s not just here that Jesus asks his followers to trust in God’s abundance,

Jesus asks for this trust again, and again.

The question is, *have we learned the lesson?*

Can you *identify with the disciples* that day?

Hey, Jesus, it’s late, we’re out in the middle of nowhere, let’s send these folks into town to buy their food.

It makes *perfect sense*, right?

I can only imagine their *shock* when Jesus says ‘YOU give them something to eat’.
 Uh, Jesus—All we have is five loaves and two fish!
 The 13 of us might be sharing that for dinner!
 We can’t feed anyone else--It’s impossible!

But Jesus is insistent.
 Bring the food here to me, and let’s have all the people sit in groups of 50.
 I’m sure at this point the disciples were pretty worried
 that they would *look ridiculous* before the crowd.

So they watch as Jesus blesses and breaks the loaves and fish,
 and then he gives each of them a basket.
 I’m sure they were thinking—*you want us to do what?*
 Hand these broken pieces out to a hungry crowd?

If I was one of those disciples I probably would have just taken the basket and
looked away...
 I’m not going to even look inside because all that’s in there are broken pieces of
 bread and fish...
 I imagine they felt stupid walking out into those crowds with *crumbs*...

But that’s when it *happened*.
 God’s Spirit went to work.
 They held out their baskets to family after family,
 and somehow people reached in and pulled out more bread and fish.
 Again, and again.
 With no explanation.
 In fact, everyone ate as much as they needed,
 so much so that there were 12 baskets full of *leftovers*!

They had walked away from Jesus with *crumbs*,
 and come back with *overflowing baskets*.
 Five loaves and two fish fed 5000 men, not counting the women and children.
 Talk about a *powerful* story.

But I wonder, *how often do we feel like the disciples?*
 like *we don’t have much to offer*...
 just barely enough time, or money, or energy...
 How often do we say, there’s a limit, or this is all I’ve got, God.

Don't we sometimes think this way as a *smaller church*?
 There's only so much we can do, right?
 But this is a story about *coming to the end of what we've got...*
 and finding that *God has so much more!*

The problem is--we are usually *focused* on our *limited resources*
 Instead of the power of *God!*

But isn't it the *very same Savior* who fed 5,000 with five loaves and two fish,
 Who works miracles in our lives, today?

I wonder, when have *you seen* such amazing abundance?
 When have you seen God *giving you more* than you need....
God making a way, when there seemed to be no way?

After months of hard work and years of saving, Reb and Jackay were all set to open their own restaurant, called "Our Place". They were just waiting on the final health inspection and permits. But *Hurricane Hugo hit*, and made it 200 miles inland to their North Carolina town. The devastation was unimaginable--uprooted trees, downed power lines, homes and stores destroyed.

Miraculously, the restaurant had electricity that day. Reb and Jackay still didn't have their final permits, but they did have a refrigerator stocked with 300 pounds of bacon and beef, bushels of tomatoes, lettuce and bread. So they decided there was only one thing to do: *give the food away*.

They sent the word out to first responders that they'd serve free BLT's and coffee. Soon firemen, policemen, linemen and other workers were filling the restaurant. When the couple heard that a nearby restaurant was scalping people by charging ten dollars for eggs, toast and bacon, they placed a sign in their window: FREE BLT'S--FREE COFFEE. *They welcomed anyone and everyone*.

Then something began to happen. Volunteers started to clean counters and sweep floors, they started washing dishes and even helping at the grill. After a local radio station shared the news, people from a neighboring town started bringing food from their freezers. Stores and dairies sent chicken, milk and other supplies. Those first cups of coffee and sandwiches stretched to over 16,000 meals. The restaurant's small stock increased to 500 loaves of bread, cases of mayonnaise, 350 pots of coffee and bushels of produce. From a sermon by Rev. Dr. Joseph Shore-Goss, Aug 16, 2012.

Do you think they would have said YES

if they'd been asked to serve 16,000 meals? ***Probably not.***

But look what happened when they were willing to give,

Willing to share.

Willing to serve.

Have you ever heard the ***feeding story in the O.T., with the prophet Elisha?***

It's a great story in 2 Kings 4:42-44:

A man came....bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God . . . twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack.

Elisha said "Give it to the people and let them eat."

But his servant said, "How can I set this before a hundred people?"

So Elisha repeated, "Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the Lord, 'They shall eat and have some left.'" He set it before them; they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the Lord.

In the Gospels, ***Jesus doesn't just feed the crowd of 5000,***

Later he does it again with 4000 people!

(and the disciples still don't get it!)

You know the ***common denominator*** in all these feeding stories?

Trust.

Letting go and letting God work.

When we ***obediently give*** what we have, in trust....

God always does more than we can even imagine!

I want you to stop right now, and ***think*** about what you have.

Think about ***YOUR time, talent, and money.***

Now how fast did you start thinking about what you ***don't have?***

How long did it take for you to start focusing on your limitations?

It's often just a few seconds!

But, what if we were open to what ***God can do*** through us, and our gifts?

I mean, according to the Bible,

There's really ***no limit to what God can do with*** what we give!

There's no limit in this ***church, either.***

We can think all day about what we don't have,
 Or we can *quit wasting time, and bring what we've got right to God...*
 And let the *Holy Spirit take us* to places we can hardly imagine.

The disciples see what they *don't have*.
 They see *limited* resources, just like we do.
 And what are they thinking when Jesus says 'you feed them'?
 They are *worried*---
 If we give this away, none of us will have dinner tonight!
 The disciples are just being realistic, as we would be.
 And they are focused on their fear of *scarcity*.

Jesus, on the other hand, sees what they *could* have.
 What they will have.
 He is so sure of it, he tells the crowd to sit down to eat.
 Jesus is focused on *God's abundance*.

So, *what would it take* for us to see God's *abundance*, instead of our *scarcity*?

Do we *believe* in what we *don't have*---or in what *God can give* us?
 Do we believe that *if WE GIVE* what we have,
GOD WILL GIVE more than we can ever imagine?
 Because that's what this story is saying.

Which will be our attitude?
Scarcity or abundance?
 How will we look at life?
 How will we judge our resources?
 How will we decide what to give to God?

We can look at the *scarcity* of a few loaves and fish,
 or the *abundance* of God,
 It's our *choice*.
 But it's a choice with some *major consequences*.

It may not be easy, but how do we move to that *abundance mentality*?
 Well, what if we have to *step out* of our comfort zone?
 And *follow* the disciples----

They took a little bit of food, and brought it to Jesus.
 They *surrendered the little bit they had—to God*.
 Only then did Jesus *bless* it, *break* it,
 And *give* it to the disciples to hand out to the crowds.

This is really important—in order to see God’s abundance,
 They had to *bring* what they had, and *give* it to God.
 They had to *give* those baskets of crumbs to the crowds....

That’s when they saw the *abundance*, not their own scarcity.
 When they took that *step of faith*...thinking they didn’t have anything to offer,
 That’s when they found out that God provided way more than enough,
 More than they could ever imagine.
 So much, that they each collected a basket of leftovers!

Much has been written about this miracle story—
was it really that the loaves and fish multiplied,
 or was it that people saw the gift,
 and started sharing what they had with one another?

What if it’s both?

What if God miraculously transformed a small lunchbox into enough for
 thousands, and people saw this generosity, and they too wanted to give?
 I believe that loaves and fish were transformed that day,
 Just as the elements of the Lord’s Supper are transformed
 into our spiritual food and drink.

But you know what else was transformed?

Human hearts.

Hearts just like ours.
 Hearts that went from *keeping, and worrying and scarcity*,
 To hearts that *shared, and were filled with joy, and abundance*.
 That is perhaps the greatest miracle!

The question is—what about our hearts?
 Will *we bring* what we have to God?
 Even if we doubt it can do any good?
 Will we bring even our worry and fear,
 And let God transform that into *abundance*?

See—Our God has ‘fuzzy’ *math* my friends.
 The **WORLD** says, *give, and there will be LESS* of what you need.
GOD says, *give, and you will have FAR MORE* than you need.
 Doesn’t make sense, but again and again in the Bible we see this crazy math.
 Keep, and have less.
 Give, and get more.

When have you been blessed like this by God?

I have kept **a blessing box** for many years—
 reminders of gifts that I have received over the years,
 some from complete strangers.
 It reminds me of how amazing God is—all the time.

The thing that ties all the blessings together is
 that these blessings came when I was being asked to
step out beyond my fear of scarcity and give—
 It was in giving, even when I felt that I couldn’t,
 That I discovered just how much God could provide.
 Talk about amazing!

So--How will we bring our resources to God—our time, talent, and money?

The Bible talks a lot about giving our *first fruits*...
 giving to God from the first that we receive (not from the leftovers)
 The Bible talks about giving a *tithe*, or 10% of what we have received,
 to honor our incredibly generous God.

I believe that the Bible talks so much about giving
 because *look what happens* when we give!
What we give is multiplied beyond our wildest imagination...
 What we bring to God becomes ***the abundance that blesses*** us,
 and everyone around us!

So what ***will you bring*** to God this year, and next?
 Are you willing to have it blessed, broken, and given away?
 Are you ready to see God’s abundance?

Friends, hear the *Good News* of the Gospel for you today!
With God, all things are possible.
And there is always *more than enough*.
We don't have to believe in the *MYTH* of *scarcity*,
We can believe in the *TRUTH* of God's *abundance*!
May we all *let go* of what we have,
and *let God* provide more than we could ever imagine!
And for that, all God's people said, Amen.