

Sermon John 6:1-21 Feeding the 5000 “*Less Is More*”

How interesting to find this story in the lectionary this week given our upcoming proposal about consolidating the worship services and Sunday School. When Rev Mercer spoke of the proposal last Sunday he referred to it as “Less Is More,” which seems to be a perfect fit with today’s story of the Feeding the 5000.

But the notion of “Less Is More” is not where we usually focus when we study this story. We usually focus on the same two things: wondering 1) Did Jesus/God multiply the bread and fish *or* 2) did the people already have *with* them their own small lunches which they simply then shared after Jesus’ blessing of the fish and loaves? But today we’re going to veer a bit from this traditional focus and instead unfold the “Less Is More” notion, both within the story and in our lives.

According to this story we can say without a doubt that our God is a Less Is More God. I’m told there is an old German proverb that says “You can’t make bread out of crumbs.” In other words, you have to have all the right ingredients; you have to have some substance. Is this true? Is this true for God? I don’t think so.

According to today’s story Jesus fed 5000 people on “crumbs.” And what about other parts of the Bible...aren’t there many many references of the “abundance within crumbs,” and of the magnitude of smallness, and again, of the notion Less Is More throughout the scriptures?

Look at the mustard seed. We’re told in Matthew 17 that if we “only” have faith the size of a single mustard seed we can move mountains. Mark 12 tells us there came in one poor widow who dropped in two farthings equal in value to a halfpenny seen by God as an enormous offering from her. We read about grains of wheat, and God’s care for a single sparrow. We read about sowing seeds...seeds so small at first but designed to grow 100’s of times their size. Then there’s small children of which we are commanded to become like, and not to mention the Hebrew people themselves, known as a small community, with “Paton Place” like ancestors who eventually birth forth a Messiah; a Messiah who comes as a small baby born in a small and lowly manger, who becomes King and Savior of the world. And then we have 12 disciples with small qualifications on their small resumes, applying for the job of ministering Jesus’ message to the world. I mean, really, look at these guys in black and white!

I think this is a close reality to what could actually be a reference (or the lack there of) if the disciples' resume would have been drafted professionally to Jesus:

IT IS ALL IN THE RESUMES

Author Unknown

July 18, 2009

**TO: Jesus, Son of Joseph
The Woodcrafter' s Carpenter Shop Nazareth 25922
FROM: Jordan Management Consultants
Jerusalem 26544
RE: Personnel Evaluations**

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have picked for managerial positions in your new organization. All of them have now taken our battery of tests, and we have not only run the results through our computers, but also arranged personal interviews for each of them with our psychologist and vocation aptitude consultant.

It is the opinion of the staff that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not have the team concept. We would recommend that you continue your search for persons of experience in managerial ability and proven capacity. We have summarized the findings of our study below:

***Simon Peter is emotional, unstable and given to fits of temper.**

***Andrew has absolutely no quality of leadership.**

***The two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, place personal interests above company loyalty (as we recall their comment to Jesus in Mark 10:35 “teacher we want you to do whatever we ask of you...grant us to sit one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”**

***Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale.**

***We believe it is our duty to tell you that Matthew (the tax collector) has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau.**

***James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus, definitely have radical leanings, given their nickname “sons of thunder.” Additionally, they both registered high scores on the manic depressive scale.**

However, one of the candidates shows great potential. He's a man of ability and resourcefulness; he is a great networker; has a keen business mind; and

has strong contacts in influential circles. He's highly motivated, very ambitious and adept with financial matters. We Recommend Judas Iscariot as your Controller and Chief Operating Officer.

All the other profiles are self-explanatory. We wish you the utmost success in your new venture.

(Boy, we sure can see that Jesus chooses people not for who they are, but for what they can become in Him.)

Anyway...back to our examples of smallness: And then finally, we have a little boy's lunch box which feeds 5000 people, and even then the supply was not depleted! What kind of a God is this where Less Is More?!

It's a God who knows His people, who knows how His people think: small, limited, scarce, shortage, survival. And He uses their level of consciousness...their level of smallness to reveal Himself to them, to us. I've said this to you before: We don't ask God for too much, we ask God for too little. The disciples themselves would have never thought outside the box of limitedness to a thought box of abundance, which is Faith. Instead we get Philip immediately starting to compute the costs, as he responds to Jesus' question, suggesting that Jesus' notion to feed them all was impossible.

That's why part of the lectionary today, which we did not read, is Ephesians 3:20 reminding us that *nothing* is impossible for God; God's power can accomplish far more than we can ask for or imagine. But we, like the disciples, set our sights too short. We're just good people who are deciding what's reasonable to meet basic needs. It's like being an overwhelmed parent sometimes, when you have all these mouths to feed and all these hearts to love and you wonder "How am I going to divide up my time and resources to meet all their needs." Jesus would tell us that we're asking the wrong question, that we have no business wondering how we're going to divide up anything. In the story today Jesus is teaching us to multiply, not divide, and we multiply when in a mode of Faith, not when in a mode of fear.

The disciples and all the people gathered that day had been longing and hoping for a king that would lead them to salvation, where they would be respected and forever fed. They were believing that Jesus was to be that king. But in doing so, Jesus is telling them that they were limiting him. Jesus would be *far more* than a king, which is why we get the walking on water thing at the end of the story. It's like he's telling us "*I'm so above that (pardon the pun). You're not going to limit*

*me to a king; I'm walking on water here! I'm way more than you ever prayed for! And by-the-way, **why!** are you so surprised (scripture says they were terrified!)?! Did you just not witness me feeding the 5000?? Are my miracles for you limited to just that? Why is it that I wouldn't be able to meet you four miles out on the water by simply walking? Why are you so surprised? How quickly you forget, how human your perceptions versus how faith-based I call you to be."*

But the people only wanted Jesus to be the fulfillment of their immediate wants and needs for a new king. They never would have thought to have gotten more than they prayed for. So Jesus called them on it, and calls us on it, to see beyond that, to see where God was leading them, to see where God is leading us.

So where is God leading us as a church? What are our expectations for our shared life together? Do we even have any? When it comes to the things we *perceive* are shortages or scarcities, do we have any hope? Do we apply a mustard-seed of Faith? Do we consider ourselves in just a survival mode (probably much like the people who came to see Jesus in the story today)?

The story reveals there is a huge perceived shortage, with little hope, but Jesus said, "No, look again, there is abundance, and enough of it to the point of 12 baskets overflowing. " In a time of recession it's very easy to concentrate on survival and maintenance, but this distracts us from our true mission: to believe in the power of God and that in God nothing *is* impossible. Jesus is calling us to look again. There is more to us than what we've perceived. There is more *for us* than what we've asked for.

What would happen if we trusted in the power of God to multiply for us in amazing ways? Remember, He fed *them all!* And he can feed us too, in more ways that we can ever imagine. Let's pray for that. Amen.

Oh God, many times we are held back by a sense that we are simply not good enough, talented enough or smart enough to do what we want to do, to do what You've created us to do. We pray for You to free us from these internal chains that bind us and hold us back from being Faith-filled in You. For in You all things are possible. We pray for the self-confidence, as an individual and as Your church, that we know only comes from our Identity in You. Help us be confident in Your abundance, and confident in Your amazing grace toward each of us. Help us to forgive ourselves for how we limit You and help us to forgive one another for how we limit You. May You shine through us in our lives and in this Your church. Amen. (The Lord's Prayer)