

Lectionary 17 Proper 12 18 B

July 29, 2018

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Last Tuesday someone in California won the 500 million dollars in one of the lottery drawings. How many of us upon hearing about the size of the jackpot to be won went out and took a chance on winning 500 million by spending 2 dollars? So often in our day many of us will take that chance. We dream of the abundance of things we could do with our bank accounts filled to overflowing. We believe we could then live a little, spending and sharing our wealth because we no longer would have to live counting our pennies, of living with the threat of not having enough.

We all have may have heard the stories at one time or another of someone who lived simply, wearing old clothes or driving beat up old car then it is reported when they die they are worth millions. Many of us wonder, why they did not spend it on things that would have made their lives a little easier, a little more comfortable. This life of scarcity many of us live is part of our nature because most of us are not a part of the 1% who have more resources than they could spend in a life time. Living with scarcity, living trying to save a little for a rainy day or to keep one step ahead of the bills is where most in our society live these days. Even when we do have that rainy day fund or a little saved, we fail to live out of our abundance out of caution knowing it might all go away in a blink of an eye.

So here today I want you to consider how you / how we might live out of our abundance. That is out of the abundance of love and grace and mercy which we have all received from God. The texts for today as well as in the next few weeks speak of the abundance God has and continues to give to us his children.

Every three years we get 5 weeks from the Gospel of John where Jesus is performing signs, the disciples and other discuss the signs and Jesus interprets the signs. For John, it is all about helping the people grow in their understanding that Jesus is God who has come to give them life and to do so abundantly. John works to help the people grow in their understanding or faith in Jesus through not only the words Jesus speaks but with his actions and the things Jesus does in the world.

Some of the signs and symbols John uses are lost on us Christians living 2000 years later. That is because we are not steeped in the Old Testament stories, in the stories of the prophets of God and the connections they have to the lives and actions of Jesus. But the first readers of the Gospel as well as the crowds depicted in the accounts would have made the connections between Jesus' signs and the actions of Moses and Elisha in addition to some of the other prophets.

Just prior to the lesson for today Jesus is debating the religious leaders about who he is. They don't believe Jesus has come from God, yet they argue they believe and trust the scriptures, the words of Moses the great prophet. Jesus replies; *'if you believe Moses you would believe me for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?'*

Then our lesson begins with a scene of Jesus traveling across the Sea of Galilee and a large crowd followed him because of all the signs they had witnessed. Then Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Especially in John, but in other parts of the Bible as well, anytime you hear about Jesus going up a mountain it is meant to invoke images of Moses going up the mountain to be in conversation with God. This is the image the crowd as well as the hearers of the Gospel would have received. Jesus, in the mold

Lectionary 17 Proper 12 18 B

July 29, 2018

and following in the footsteps of Moses. The difference is Moses went up to talk with God, while Jesus is God in conversation with the disciples.

As they talked, Jesus sees the gathering crowd coming towards them, so he asks them; 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?' The disciples respond out of their scarcity. A months wages would not be enough to give them a little. Andrew informs them of a young boy with five loaves and two fish, then discounts that by saying; 'what is that compared to the great many people who had gathered.'

This is where God's abundance is about to be made known. There on the mountainside as the crowd of 5000 gathered there was an abundance of space and an abundance of grass for all to sit as Jesus hosted a meal. Taking the five loaves and two fish, Jesus blessed them and distributed them to all the people and all who ate had their fill. From the leftover pieces the disciples filled 12 baskets with food. Much like the account of Elisha feeding the hungry crowd from our first lesson with a few loaves of bread. There he told the servant bringing the offering to give it to the people, for thus says the Lord; "they shall eat and have some left."

Where the disciples and others saw scarcity, limited means and not enough food for even the disciples to be fed, Jesus sees enough for all. For the people they understood that here on the mountain they were in the presence of someone of great power and authority. In their eyes, one like the great prophets of old, a great prophet who had come into the world. For them the blinders they had on were lifted and they were so amazed by the great sign Jesus did that day that they conspired to come and make him king. In response Jesus did what Jesus often did, he withdrew and retreated up the mountain by himself.

How often when we read stories of the Bible do we miss the bigger picture of who Jesus is. We take these accounts of Jesus doing signs and miracles for granted doubting the everyday signs which happen all round us everyday. Living in scarcity we limit our understanding, not seeing the bigger picture, not seeing the abundance and the possibilities which surround us.

It was six years ago as I got back on the bus following the trip to the NYG in New Orleans. The bus had 50 people on board and we were to receive box lunches for everyone. But for some reason our bus did not receive on of the big boxes holding our lunches. So we had maybe 20 or 25 lunches. Some of the adults from one of the churches on the bus tried to claim enough lunches for their youth. They rightly claimed the paid for the lunches and their youth were hungry and deserved to eat. But it was no different for the remaining youth and adults. Finally cooler heads prevailed among the adults and we made an announcement. We did not receive enough lunches for everyone to have a box. But if they were hungry and needed a full box lunch they were welcome to have one. Otherwise if they were not going to eat their pickle or bag of chips or only wanted a half of a sandwich, take what they wanted and pass the rest along.

By the time the box returned to front of the bus where I was there were still a few box lunches which were not touched plus a variety of chips and cookies and other items which were passed along. After passing it along again to be sure everyone had an opportunity to get what they needed, there were still items left in the box. The youth and adults in the bus saw the box of food with different eyes, not selfishly trying to claim what they thought they deserved or wanted. Instead they understood there was an abundance of food if everyone took what they needed and passed the rest on to others. No one went hungry that day,

Lectionary 17 Proper 12 18 B

July 29, 2018

nothing was wasted that day and everyone was filled. While it is not the same as Jesus feeding the thousands it can be a reminder of how things can change when we strive to live out of our abundance and not out of our scarcity in life.

These miracles happen not just around food or money but within life itself. When we live in scarcity we see the limits the world wants us to see instead of the abundance of possibilities which are offered to us. The world is constantly putting the images before us of scarcity, of getting all we can now for it will disappear later. That we need to build bigger barns or hoard all we can get our hands on telling us if we don't take care of ourselves no one else will. In doing so we not only limit ourselves but we limit God's ability to respond and meet the needs of all his children. But the scriptures are filled not with the rules and laws which limit or fence us in, they are filled with images of abundance and prayer that we might be filled to overflowing by the grace of God.

Paul's prayer in his words to the Ephesians with this doxology and blessing is mine for you this day. *"I pray that, according to the riches of his, that is God's, glory, God may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."*

T.G.B.T.G.

Pastor Michael

John 6:1-21

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

Lectionary 17 Proper 12 18 B

July 29, 2018

2 Kings 4:42-44

A man came from Baal-shalishah, 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 he 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.

Ephesians 3:14-21

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.