

It is a distressing time. Jesus has just learned about the death of his cousin John, beheaded by King Herod. Jesus is grief-stricken. Shaking off the dust from his feet after this unhappy visit home, Jesus tries to seclude himself, to withdraw to a deserted place, but the crowds are close behind. They are relentless in following him. They reach out to him for healing, call to him, hold their children and sick out for him to touch them. Jesus doesn't say no to them; he can't bear to, despite his own weariness. But the disciples want to protect Jesus from the demanding crowds; they wish to send the crowds away. We might imagine that Jesus is stretched to his human limitations, even in this moment when he makes God's extravagance tangible, in the feeding of the five thousand.

The disciples may have excused Jesus for sounding a little out of it and punchy after this very full day – but wasn't it crazy talk – for him to say – “*You give them something to eat!*” Did Jesus think they could turn into miracle workers on the spot? As if they could conjure up enough box lunches to feed every hungry person in the crowd! As if they themselves had enough!

Actually the disciples knew that *what they had* was barely enough for their own group, that was plain to see. What with a measly five loaves of bread and two fish. Why even mention they had it, it was inconsequential. Yet they did mention it, to show Jesus they were paying attention, “*We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.*” They were being honest, right? Better to tell Jesus we are totally unprepared for this, it's not that we don't want to help, but we lack adequate resources for the task. This is way out of their league to feed a crowd. *We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.*

But then, did Jesus ask them to feed the whole crowd? No, he didn't. He said, “*You give them something to eat.*” Do you hear how disjointed this sounds, as if they are on two different wave-lengths throughout the conversation.

You give them something.

*We have nothing here...but five loaves and two fish.*

“Why does our *something* always look like *nothing*, to us?”<sup>1</sup> “The thing is, five loaves and two fish *is* something. It's not everything,” writes theologian Anna Carter Florence, “but it's not “nothing” either. It's something we have, and something we can offer. It's the offering of our *something* that makes us disciples,” says Florence. Again – “It's the offering of our *something* that makes us disciples.”

There is *something* to this “*something*” we have to offer to God, and to offer for goodness, to offer to service *in God's name*. And what strikes me about this *something* is that the disciples – right as they say to Jesus, “*We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish,*” they then hand him these gifts. They literally place the situation in Jesus' hands.

Perhaps this is what it means to confront one's limitations and realize we do not have control...that disciples must die to their own power. First, we are called to recognize that our *something* is not *nothing*, and, then we are called to offer it to Jesus to bless.

We can pray for the sight and insight to recognize our ‘somethings’ and then comes the hard part – to choose to offer it to God. Jesus says, *You give them something to eat*. I imagine that Jesus knows we are ambivalent about our something – that we fear it will not be enough, that it won't be good enough or amount to anything. Because on our own it might end up like that. Or worse, says Florence, “We might end up just like Herod, serving up wretched displays of power.”

And yes, I would say that these are fears – as real as I am standing here! But we do not do it on our own, if we answer God's call, the invitation from Jesus – “We don't do it on our own. Jesus takes our *something*, and blesses it and breaks it.”

When Jesus blesses the bread as he did that day...as he does today at God's Table... "Jesus reveals abundance where suspicion of scarcity has taken root." "What seems not enough is blessed, broken and given back to the disciples for distribution. They do "give them something to eat" as Jesus requested, and it is more than enough to satisfy the crowd's hunger."<sup>ii</sup>

Imagine – your hunger and longing satisfied...that your *something*, when blessed, is more than enough....and it fills you with such joy and generosity...that you are made a new creation in Christ. This is the kingdom of heaven we seek, the kind of life we yearn for as a community of Jesus, the church. This is the hope that is in us.

This is the *something*...and the blessing...that founded and sustains Manna Meal – as we heard about at the dedication of Helen's Kitchen last Monday.

This is the *something* that we are invited to offer to Jesus as we seek to be a faithful community, a reconciling community, a generous community.

But we get in our own way – don't we! We have conversations like Jesus and the disciples did – disjointed ones:

You give them something.

*We have nothing here...but five loaves and two fish.*

Our *something* comes up looking like *nothing* all too often. And we feel like failures...or we misuse our power or resources....we forget that God calls us to offer ourselves – all of ourselves, our whole life –whether it feels w-h-o-l-e or if it feels h-o-l-e – God invites us to offer our *something* to be blessed and transformed, made new and then given away. We, like Jesus, The Bread of Life, are called to offer ourselves, to be blessed and broken and given away. And then, like those baskets full of leftovers...there will be enough. We will not lose – instead, we will gain our lives, blest lives. We will be a new creation, a reconciling creation.

So, what do you think? Will you hand your *something* to Jesus...literally put your life in his hands...place the situation in his hands...and see how God carries you through, how Jesus blesses your *something* so that it is more than enough. Can you even dare imagine it – enough time for God's work, enough money for our necessities, enough grace to be kind to one another, enough generosity to share, enough faith to persevere, enough hope to work for change....if you cannot imagine it, start here: imagine giving yourself to Jesus today, for one day, and then tomorrow, decide again, and the day after choose Jesus again. And see how he blesses you. I dare you!

Or start here: receive The Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation today at God's Table, and ask Jesus to bless you this day and give you strength for tomorrow. As you do this, feel God's grace all around you as you share in the Holy Bread. It is a sharing that we do together. For we do not do this on our own, we are Christians together, we seek to follow the Way of Jesus, all of us all together.

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<sup>i</sup> Anna Carter Florence, "Preaching the Lesson" in *Lectionary Homiletics*, Proper 13, August 3, 2008, page 15.

<sup>ii</sup> Don C. Richter, Living by the Word" in *Christian Century*, July 28, 2008, page 18.