

Nick just changed the world!

Molly just changed the world!

Each afternoon... and again in the evening... these words rang out across Luther Park Bible Camp. You see, they were collecting money for ELCA World Hunger—not by passing an offering plate during worship... but by having a collection at the canteen. Whenever *anyone*—campers / staff / pastors / youth directors—whenever *anyone* made a purchase, they were encouraged to give their change (loose coins / dollar bills... whatever they chose) to this worthy cause. And every time someone gave (no matter the amount), the canteen worker asked his/her name and then yelled out (at the top of their voice): ***Abby just changed the world!***

It really was an incredible thing—hearing this continuous litany during canteen time each day. Whether we were sitting and talking at a picnic table... swimming in the pool... playing basketball / volleyball... or tie-dyeing t-shirts, we were all witness to the generosity... the sharing / giving in our midst.

When confronted with an issue as big / daunting as world hunger, it would have been easy for the campers to think: “What can I do? I don’t have that much money. I’m just a kid... what difference can I make?”

This is often how it goes with us, isn’t it?!

We look at the magnitude of the problem / issue... and we feel helpless / overwhelmed...

We become “hardened” to the depth / immediacy of the need... we make excuses for not acting / not giving something... even a small amount...

But that didn’t happen that week at Bible camp. The endless litany of those words ringing out proved that.

I have no idea how much money was collected that week (or over the course of the summer), but I do know it was a significant amount. Individually we may not have had much to give (in reference to the magnitude of the problem), but combined with what others gave... and blessed by God... I am convinced that ***we did***, in fact, ***change the world*** (if only in a small way)... by our willingness to share what “little” we had.

In today’s gospel reading, a crowd of people has followed Jesus to the mountain where he and his disciples have retreated to—a huge crowd... about 5000 in all, we are told!

Knowing the peoples’ hunger / need, Jesus turns to Philip and asks, “*Where are we going to buy bread to feed these people?*” It is a test, John tells us... for Jesus already knew what he was going to do...

How did Philip respond? “*You’ve got to be kidding, Lord!*” OK, he didn’t really say that... but I imagine he probably thought it. Philip ran the numbers in his head... and said, “*Even 6 months of wages wouldn’t buy bread for everyone here to get even a bite.*”

In other words, “*We can’t feed all these people!*”

Then his brother Andrew jumped in. “*There is a young boy over here who has 5 barley loaves of bread and a couple of fish,*” he offered, “*...but... what good is that with so many?*”

In other words, “*We can’t feed all these people!*”

In truth... those five barley loaves were probably not very big—not like our loaves of bread today... probably more like the size of a hotdog bun. And as far as the fish were concerned, we’re probably not

talking about 8-10 lb. smoked walleyes either (as if that would really make a difference)... more likely fish the size of sardines.

What was Jesus thinking?! There were too many people... the need was too great... the resources too limited...

From their human perspective, the reality of the situation was crystal clear—there was no way *they* could feed the people gathered there on that hillside.

But Jesus knew better. “*Make the people sit down,*” he tells his disciples. And then he took the resources that were available (the 5 loaves and 2 fish given by the young boy)... he gave thanks... and began breaking them into pieces to pass around to the people.

And everyone ate their fill... and there were even leftovers! We are told that the disciples gathered up 12 additional baskets full of the leftovers—as one commentator put it, “...one basket for every disciple who said [or thought] it couldn’t be done.” Talk about ABUNDANCE!

Dear friends, we have a generous God... who can do incredible things!

A God beyond our comprehension... beyond our expression. A God of ABUNDANCE!

This God—in Jesus—acts in ways that reveal God’s power for LIFE – life in ABUNDANCE! A power that fills people with what they need... and sees that there is plenty left over.

ABUNDANCE is a central theme in John’s gospel.

- In chapter 1, John tells us that from Jesus—the Word made flesh—we have all received *grace upon grace* (= grace without measure).
- Think of Jesus’ first miracle (sign) in John’s gospel—when he turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana. Jesus instructs the servants to fill some jars with water, and they fill them to the brim. And what happens? Not just wine... but good wine—the best wine of the party!
- At the community water well in Samaria—the land of Gentiles / “outsiders—Jesus tells a woman about the water he gives: “living water” that never runs dry... the gushes up to eternal life for all!
- In chapter 10, verse 10, Jesus says, “*I came that they may have LIFE, and have it ABUNDANTLY.*”
- John closes out his gospel by noting that in addition to all the things he has told us, there is so much more he could tell us... but that “*these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life---ABUNDANT LIFE---in his name.*”

If you haven’t read the Gospel of John for a while, I encourage you to read it... for throughout this book—whether it is top shelf wine at the end of a wedding celebration (and lots of it)... a picnic lunch for thousands... or a catch of fish so big the disciples can’t haul it in—there is ABUNDANCE... always *more than enough* with God... a virtual flood of God’s grace for all – through Jesus Christ!

Yet, too often, I am afraid, our faith mirrors that of Philip and Andrew (and I would guess the rest of the disciples as well)—for we can’t seem to see past our perceived limited resources / tight budgets... the 6 months’ wages... or the meager “5 loaves and 2 fish” that we do have to share...

We base our lives on the perception of “scarcity”... and our own fears of “not enough” / not being enough. We save and hoard and worry... and end up living small / limited / “safe” lives—not the ABUNDANT lives

God wants for us. We pull back when we should step forward in faith. We give in to our fear of “shortfall” / “running out”... rather than giving / sharing the “5 loaves and 2 fish” that we have... and trusting in God’s power and grace to multiply it / make it all work...

Dear friends, as Christians we are called to GO places where we have never been... to DO things that we have never attempted... to BE what have never envisioned / dreamed. We are called to take risks... to step forward in faith / trust... when doing what we know God wants us to do...

- ➔ When a young Catholic nun came face to face with the masses of suffering and dying in Calcutta, India... she felt called to serve those suffering the most. Her individual resources alone would never be enough to fulfill such a calling to serve the poorest of the earth. But Mother Teresa’s faith fueled her love for “the least of these” and the passion of her call... and with that, she founded the Missionaries of Charity, a small order of only 13 members. Over the years, that order grew to thousands of members giving care in many different orphanages / charity centers. Faith multiplies the “little” resources we have to share... and makes a way forward...
- ➔ In 1976, when Millard and Linda Fuller founded Habitat for Humanity International, there were limited resources but a great need of affordable / decent housing for the working poor. With only a few carpentry tools and a small group of volunteers, it would have been easy to ask, “What are they among so many?” Yet their faith and passion for justice compelled them forward. Today Habitat for Humanity serves as a testimony to the multiplying power of faith (and resources shared)...
- ➔ Heifer Project International began as Heifers for Relief in 1944. Its founder was an Ohio farmer named Dan West... who served as a relief worker during the Spanish Civil War. As he was ladling out milk to hungry refugee children, he thought, “These children don’t need a cup [of milk], they need a cow.” When he returned home, he took his idea to his neighbors and church... asking if they would give some money to help him buy heifers for families in need. In 1944, the first shipment of 17 heifers was sent to Puerto Rico. This simple idea of giving families a source of food rather than short-term relief caught on. 77 years later, millions of hungry families across the globe have been helped through Heifer International who now distributes not only cattle... but fish, chickens, pigs, goats, sheep, oxen, water buffalos, bees, llamas, alpacas, camels, and rabbits to poor communities around the world.

“Where are we going to buy bread to feed these hungry people?” Jesus asks each of us today. It is a test...

How you answer this question will make a huge difference in how you decide to participate in / contribute to our ministry together – in this place and beyond.

This story of the feeding of the 5000—this miracle / sign of God’s power and ABUNDANCE —asks us an important question:

Do we believe / trust that God can take what we each have to share—our “5 loaves and 2 fish”—and “multiply it” to provide what we need in order to do the ministry that God calls us to do?

Or to put it another way: Are we, out of our fears of “not having enough” limiting what God can do / wants to do...in and through us?

John 6 invites us to live into the grace-filled inheritance we have been given in Christ Jesus.

It challenges us to take seriously God's generous offer and gift of ABUNDANT life—not so that we end up being wealthy... but so that we live / experience a faith that enriches and enlivens us... and spurs us forward...

Faith calls us to take risks—to GO places where we have never been... to DO things that we have never attempted (aren't sure how we'll do them)... to BE what we have not yet envisioned / dreamed... so that God can change the world through us.

What gifts / resources do YOU bring to the Body of Christ?

Big or small... they are needed.

5 loaves of barley bread and a couple of fish—they don't seem like much, but in God's hands... they are more than enough.

[Over the last 9 years... YOU have given (with your loose coins / dollar bills)—above and beyond your regular weekly giving (and paying off our debt)—over \$13, 000 to Helping Hands projects (to support the work of local agencies / address needs in our community)... and over \$11,000 to Joyful Noise (which goes to ELCA World Hunger – to address hunger / water needs across the globe).]

It really is incredible, isn't it?! Talk about ABUNDANCE!

It just goes to show... that our lives—our time... our gifts / resources (however “limited” / “meager” we may think they are)—when offered in gratitude and faith... can become channels of God's ABUNDANT grace and love...

Through us... God can... and will... change the world.

My prayer for you... for us... is the same as Paul's (from his letter to the church in Ephesus):

“I pray that, according to the riches of God's glory, God may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being through the 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... what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ Jesus that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to the One 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.”