

“Enough”
Reverend Bill Gause
Overbrook Presbyterian Church
18th Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 6, 2017

First Scripture Reading: Isaiah 25:6-10a

⁶On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. ⁷And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. ⁸Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.

⁹It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. ¹⁰For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain.

Second Scripture Reading: Matthew 14:13-21

¹³Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. ¹⁵When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” ¹⁶Jesus said to them, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” ¹⁷They replied, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” ¹⁸And he said, “Bring them here to me.” ¹⁹Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. ²¹And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.



Sermon: *“Enough”*

I consider myself a thoughtful, logical person. But I admit, there are lots of things in life that don't make sense. For instance, we drive on parkways and park on driveways. That makes no sense. And grades in school run from A to B to C to D to ... F? Why did they skip E? And why does the word monosyllabic have five syllables? And here's one more for you that makes no sense. If “pros” and “cons” are opposites of one another, then why isn't the word “Congress” the opposite of “Progress”?

Actually, that one makes a lot of sense right there.

Today's New Testament reading doesn't make any sense, either. One of my favorite stories in the Bible is the story of Jesus feeding the multitudes with five loaves and two fish. It's the only one of the miracle stories that is included in all four gospels, so the early church must have thought it was a pretty important story. But the thing that has always struck me about it is the way common sense seems to take a leap out of a window.

Matthew tells us that 5000 men are present, plus women and children. So, we call this the feeding of the 5,000, but there would actually have been a lot more. How many people were there all together? 15,000? 20,000? Let's be conservative in our estimation and say that each man was accompanied by one child OR one woman. That makes the crowd about 10,000 people.

And asking twelve disciples to feed a crowd of that size *really* makes no sense. Feeding that many people would be a herculean task for even the most advanced catering company. Just to give you a comparison, the USS George HW Bush is one of the largest warships in the world. To feed its crew, seven galleys operate 23 hours a day to prepare upwards of 18,000 meals just to feed a crew of about 5,000.¹ And Jesus expected these twelve disciples to feed probably twice that many or more! Common sense says that's just too much for the disciples to do. Yet Jesus tells them "you give them something to eat."

It doesn't make sense. Never mind that He intends it to happen with just five loaves and two small fish. That little detail is just gravy at this point. The expectation put on the disciples passes the bounds of logic long before the loaves and fishes ever enter into it. No, the common-sense thing to do would be to send these people away to scrounge food for themselves.

The second thing that defies common sense is the expectation that these people couldn't provide for themselves. I mean, who leaves for the day without making plans for what you will eat and drink? You go to school or work; you pack a lunch, or you take some money so you can buy lunch or you make plans to go home. But you don't just walk out of the house with nothing and give no thought to what you will need for the day. And neither did the people of Jesus' time. It is most likely they would have travelled with something to tide them over until they got home.

Common sense suggests that these thousands of people should have been able to provide for themselves. If they had been so shortsighted as to not bring something to eat, isn't that really *their* fault?

You can tell the disciples had sense. They told Jesus "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves."

There's nothing around there: no McDonalds, no Kroger, no UDF. And it's too late in the day to make arrangements for these people. Send them to go and find their own food! But Jesus says to the disciples, "They need not go away; *you* give them something to eat."

The disciples' appeal to common sense; their assessment of the available options is accurate. But Jesus doesn't care. He replies to a very sensible observation and, a very sensible solution, by turning it back on the disciples: you give them something to eat.

12 disciples. Thousands of people.

¹ Shardlow, Emily. "Aboard the USS George HW Bush: How to Cook Dinner for 5,000 | The National." *The National*. Abu Dhabi Media, 5 Sept. 2011. Web. 01 Aug. 2014. <<http://www.thenational.ae/lifestyle/food/aboard-the-uss-george-hw-bush-how-to-cook-dinner-for-5-000#full>>.

Etter, Gerald. "Aircraft Carriers: Kitchens Feed 5,000 Sailors." *The Spokane Chronicle* [Spokane, OR] 7 July 1987, Food sec.: F4. Print.

<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1345&dat=19870707&id=uD5IAAAIIBAJ&sjid=rvoDAAAIBAJ&pg=3294,1164478>

Now I'm not one to brag, but in my former life I routinely provided meals for up to a hundred college students. Usually that meant shopping, arranging caterers, and ordering pizza. But there was one time that I personally cooked a meal for 50 college students *by myself*. Spaghetti, sauce, bread, and grilled Italian sausages. Plus, cookie fluff and banana pudding for desert.

It took the major part of an afternoon, and it almost killed me, but I did it. So, I speak from experience when I say that there is no way 12 people can feed 10,000. Now granted, Jesus wasn't necessarily asking for a three-course meal. But even bread for that many people would have been hard to come.

It's not just the work involved. The disciples point out the sheer volume of what would be needed to feed these 5,000 men and their accompanying women and children and the irrefutable fact that between the twelve of them all they have is five loaves and two fish. Common sense would suggest that this is not even enough to feed the disciples, much less the thousands of people gathered around.

Yet Jesus does not change his stance. You give them something to eat.

It just doesn't make any sense. But that's actually the case with lots of the things that Jesus said:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..."²

"...Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also..."³

"Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."⁴

"...Go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow Me."⁵

"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to Me."⁶

Logic dictates that there are things that you can't do. A small group of people can't feed thousands. When someone hits you, your response should not be to make it easy for them to do it again. You don't sell all your stuff no matter what anyone promises you. We know what Jesus teaches. But we also know what makes sense and what Jesus advocates; what Jesus calls his disciples to do and to be, very often does not.

I often read the opinion page in the *Columbus Dispatch* and one letter writer who was concerned about the situation with unaccompanied minors coming into the United States from Mexico posed the following question:

² Matthew 5:43-44, NRSV

³ Matthew 5:39, NRSV

⁴ Matthew 26:52, NRSV

⁵ Matthew 19:21, NRSV (See also Mark 10:21, Luke 18:22)

⁶ Matthew 25:40, NRSV

“Are we truly our brother’s keeper and responsible to care for the poor and downtrodden? I believe God wants us to help others but gives us the freedom to make reasonable choices. It is unreasonable to expect that we could protect the entire world from violence and poverty (emphasis added).”⁷

Yes, it *is* unreasonable, and yet Jesus routinely asks us to do just that; to care for the poor and the oppressed; to take on the challenges of what appear to be unreasonable tasks.

You see, like the disciples, we often feel ill-prepared for the magnitude of the tasks to which Jesus calls us. But that doesn’t make us exempt from them. When we hear that hungry people need to eat, we might think that someone else has gifts for food preparation, not me. When we hear that there are people who live in sub-standard housing, we might think that there are other people with a talent for home repair, but not me. When we hear about immigrants who need help navigating this new hometown of theirs, we might think someone else has that skill-set, but not me.

When there is a need, it is not unusual to feel inadequate for the task at hand. We don’t have enough: enough money, enough skill, enough knowledge and perhaps most important, we don’t have enough time. In the words of the old fisherman’s prayer: “Oh God, Your ocean is so big and my boat is so small.”

We hear Jesus saying “*you* give them something to eat” and we see the magnitude of the challenge to which Jesus is calling us and we can’t help but think, I don’t have enough; I am not enough. And yet Jesus still calls. Not just them, but you, me, all of us.

You know, we always remember that after the multitudes are fed, there were twelve baskets left over and that everyone had enough to eat. But where did those loaves and fish come from in the first place? As John remembers the story, it was a little boy who volunteered the loaves and fish, but as Matthew tells it, it was the disciples themselves who gave them and those five loaves and two fish were everything that they had. In spite of the fact that what Jesus proposed defied logic and common sense, in spite of the fact that what they had to offer didn’t amount to very much at all - the disciples gave what they had and in the hands of the Lord, what they had was enough.

And THAT is the point of this story for us today; not just that Jesus performed a miracle *then*, but that Jesus is repeating that miracle *today and every day*.

It is unreasonable to expect that what you have to offer is enough to make a difference. It makes no sense to think that your meager gifts can have any impact at all on the problems of this world. To look out on the crowds of thousands, and then to look down in your own hands and see only what you have to offer and to hear the voice of Jesus saying “you give them something to eat” ... defies logic.

But being a disciple is not a solo activity. And Jesus didn’t call just you. We were not put here alone and we are not expected to act alone. It is not our job to be super heroes. It is only our job to use the gifts God has given us for the tasks to which God has called us. And when we do that; when we all do that; then by the grace of God, it is enough.

To God be all glory, honor, power and dominion, in this world, and in the world that is to come. Amen.

⁷ Smith, Doug. "Helping Kids in Crisis Tests Our Limits." *The Columbus Dispatch*. The Dispatch Printing Company, 28 July 2014. Web. 01 Aug. 2014. <<http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/editorials/2014/07/28/helping-kids-in-crisis-tests-our-limits.html>>.