

# Enough is Enough

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June 10, 2018

## Psalm 23

<sup>1</sup>The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

<sup>2</sup>He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

<sup>3</sup>He restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup>Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

<sup>5</sup>You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

<sup>6</sup>Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

## Mark 6:30-44

<sup>30</sup>The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup>He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. <sup>32</sup>And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. <sup>33</sup>Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. <sup>34</sup>As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. <sup>35</sup>When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; <sup>36</sup>send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat." <sup>37</sup>But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?" <sup>38</sup>And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." When they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." <sup>39</sup>Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. <sup>40</sup>So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. <sup>41</sup>Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. <sup>42</sup>And all ate and were filled; <sup>43</sup>and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. <sup>44</sup>Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

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The central truth here is that Jesus has enough, and is big enough, to deal with whatever we're going through in each of our situations today. But this hits me especially hard when I think about what my friends in Nijar go through everyday. Can Jesus be enough for a country that is perpetually ranked as least developed in the world by the UN, where despite the warmth and beauty of the people it feels like there's little possibility for change? I think about the chronic lack of long term thinking, the climate getting worse, world economic powers

exploiting its resources, and the ever present threat of terror attacks from neighboring countries. It seems very improbable that we or the church or anybody will be big enough to help this country be healthy and thriving.

So what do we do when we don't think we have enough? Do we pack it in and let someone else deal with it? I know we all have problems with wishing we had more, or thinking we don't have enough to share. What we're able to do in those situations often depends on our attitude and perception of what we do have. Having enough for big problems makes me think of a proverb the Hausa people in Nijar will say: "Mai hakuri yakan daffa dutse har ya sha romonshi... in mai izon wuta ya daure." This proverb is primarily about patience. It means: *The truly patient person can cook a rock, all the way until it makes his soup.* But then some people will add the little tag to complete the reality of the situation: *The truly patient can cook a rock, all the way until it makes his soup (as long as the one tending the fire keeps throwing on logs).* So that is to say: when all you have is a rock, then you will be waiting a loooong time to get a meal to satisfy your hunger. Patience will help, but if you have someone whose helping you who's willing to continually add fuel to your fire, then you can slowly do just about anything! And I think our Gospel reading today pushes us to see that Jesus is the one who will keep throwing logs on our fires, he is enough to sustain the little or the much that we have.

Turning back to that reading, the first thing that always strikes me here is that it says they sat down in the "green grass." This is a strange detail because it's not really needed here, especially when Mark is clearly, through the rest of the book, trying to tell all the news about Jesus in a concise and not flowery way. But I think after a deeper look this detail does actually matter. When Mark tells us this detail about the green grass, he's connecting what Jesus was doing to other parts of the Bible. In highlighting the "green grass," Mark was trying to help us to understand the full message of what Jesus did when he fed all these people. In this feeding of the five thousand, Jesus was re-enacting Psalm 23, and basically saying, "I am the Lord who is your shepherd and can take care of your needs." This clear connection to Psalm 23 comes in so many details that Mark includes in this story. Jesus gives us the first sign when he says the people are like "sheep without a shepherd." Then there is the very specific detail of the green grass where the Good shepherd makes the sheep lay down in both passages. Then Jesus instructs the people in "right paths" before he provides all they need to eat. If we look further into the surrounding context of this event, we see that King Herod and the Pharisees are carefully watching and waiting to see if Jesus will become a challenger to the throne with this group of people that have gathered to him out in the desert. So Jesus is also basically responding to the banquet Herod has just held by making a banquet for the people in the wilderness "in presence of their enemies."

But this meal with 5,000 of his followers also makes a connection to another important meal with twelve of his followers later. It's similar to the last meal Jesus shared with his disciples at the Passover in Mark chapter 14. Mark uses the same words and ideas repeatedly for both stories and they happen in a way that make them sound like each other. Both stories show people reclining for a meal, Jesus taking the bread, giving thanks, and breaking it and giving it out to his disciples for everyone to eat. Mark draws clear connections between these stories to highlight Jesus' point that he can take care of all our needs like the Good Shepherd. The connections to the Last Supper show that Jesus can do this because he is always with us.

His body was given for us and so in faith he is in us, and that can always be our source of having enough.

What the feeding of the 5,000 adds to these other scripture teachings is the part where Jesus says, “you give them something.” Because he is with us, in us, and he is able to do it through us, he can tell his disciples and tell us to give something to others. Often times it feels like what we’ve got to work with is only 5 loaves and 2 fish, so it’s not enough to even make a dent. But when we give what we can through what we’ve learned, what our talents are, what hidden or obvious resources God has blessed us with, then God has an amazing way of multiplying it. And then there’s all the prayer power that can be added too. Jesus can pull together these various ingredients and God’s movement starts to become clear in the amazing way that the small pieces that we’ve given change and move and grow.

This has been our experience recently working in Niger. We’ve been working with our partners in the Evangelical Church in the Republic of Niger (EERN) to train leaders for **COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION!** That’s felt like an almost impossible and improbable task in these first four years as we’ve seen so many of the obstacles that come, like the language barrier, or finding shared vision and resources with local people, or planning training events in a slower moving culture. But finally last year we did have a break-through and started training in one of the seven regions of the country. We were able to hold a comprehensive training for 25 lay and ordained pastors to teach them a method called Community Health Evangelism (abbreviated CHE). Unfortunately, only a few weeks after the training we were scheduled to come back to the States for a time, and it felt like we were going to inevitably lose so much momentum on the training and the CHE evangelists we’re mentoring. We really just trained them in the tip of the iceberg for this CHE method and there was so much more for them to learn and internalize.

But even while we were in the States we received outstanding reports of what these trainees were doing. It was obvious to see that it’s through the prayers of our supporters, the hard work of the national leaders, and the courage given by the Spirit that the CHE evangelists have gone forward with a focused purpose. In the time we were gone they instigated groups of people in their villages to band together and make great changes for cleaning out fallen-in wells, reopening washed out roads, teaching life-saving health basics for children, and starting Bible study groups of cultural Muslims trying to apply the teachings of Jesus. Seeing this reminds us clearly that Jesus is enough to take the little we have and use it for the needs we see around us.

That’s why it seems to me that CHE is a great example for us of what Jesus calls each of us to do. The Good News sharing of CHE is basically adding little bits of knowledge about preventing health problems, or community problem solving, or sharing the wisdom of Jesus’ way of relationship. These little bits are multiplied as people listen, and try it, and tell others. Jesus is moving in the telling of these stories, in the actions that follow, in the sharing of belief from people to people. CHE is a method for working with troubled communities to help them see their own actions as important, to help them use the little or the much they have been given, to help them use the teachings of Jesus in their lives. But I know this same flow from small gifts to great help also translates to our lives as well.

As Mother Teresa famously said, “We can do no great things, only small things with great love”. If Jesus is enough, then we can be okay with starting with the small things. We can start by reflecting on what is the little that we may have? What is the little we can share? What

are the little but important things that we need to learn from our neighbors? How can we add prayer to fill in the gaps? What can Jesus do through us? I know it's difficult when we don't feel like we have enough and it feels like too much or not realistic to do all that God directs us to do in our own communities, let alone the rest of the world. But Jesus confronts us with his message that pours out of his repeated actions, saying, "I am enough for you. I am enough if you will rely on me, follow me, let me be your shepherd." Then Jesus goes even further to call us not to be so quick to send people away, or see things as too big, or give up on the problems of the people around us. Coming up with enough may seem improbable, but not when we remember that Jesus is with us, he is in us, and he is able to make it enough. Amen.

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