

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time — John 6:1-15

“What would Jesus do?” I heard about a little boy who got into an argument with his sister about who was going to get the last brownie, and his mother overheard the discussion and came in to try to resolve the fuss. Her two children, both extremely upset, each wanted that last brownie. So sensing the opportunity to teach a deeper spiritual truth, the mother looked at her children and asked that very relevant question...“What would Jesus do?” Well, that little boy immediately answered, “That’s easy. Jesus would just break that brownie and make 5,000 more!”

How many of you grew up in a home where your mother served a meal of leftovers every now and then? My Mom used to say that we are cleaning out the refrigerator tonight meaning, all the leftovers in the refrigerator would be re-heated and become the evening meal.

I suspect all of us have found ourselves ordering more pizza than we could eat, asking for a carry-out box to cart home those last slices for a late-night snack. **Leftovers** are a part of our shared life experience.

The lessons we hear today from the Old Testament and our Gospel tell similar stories of people eating a meal from meager resources. Over 700 years before the birth of Christ, the prophet Elisha received an offering from a successful farmer. The man brings the first fruits of his crop as an offering to God.

Rather than store the grain, the prophet tells the man to feed the people with his bounty. “But how can so little food feed 100 people, he says.”

The prophet tells him that not only will everyone have enough to eat, but there will be food left over. And that's exactly what happened.

Now, fast forward 700 years into the first century. Our Lord is teaching in the place we call Galilee. John tells us the time of the Passover was near. Thousands of people were on the move, many traveling to Jerusalem for the holy days.

We pick up the story with Jesus looking up and seeing more than 5,000 people coming toward him.

Jesus turns to His disciple Philip, asking, "Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?" Philip, being a practical man, answers, "Two hundred days wages worth of food would not be enough to feed so many."

But Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, pipes up and says, "There's a boy here who has five loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?"

We know the rest of the story. Our Lord takes the boy's lunch of bread and fish, offers thanks, and starts to give it to the crowd. John tells us, "**all are fed and satisfied,**" – meaning there was more than enough food for everyone. With food in abundance, we are told the disciples gather 12 baskets of leftovers.

It's the **leftovers** that captured my imagination. Both the stories about Elisha and our Lord tell us that what was believed to be a **shortfall** actually turned into a **windfall**. **Scarcity** was transformed into **abundance**. So what might God be saying to us today from these fascinating lessons?

First, **God welcomes every sacrificial gift.** When Andrew mentioned to Jesus that a boy had brought a small lunch of five loaves and two fish, Jesus welcomed that news as the find of the century.

We are prone to discount, unfairly, the value of another's gift in the scales of our own greed or need. But not when we love the giver of the gift. Children and grandchildren delight parents and grandparents with crayon scribbling's and formless globs of dried clay. We "ooh" and "ah" over these priceless offerings and smile at a child's pride.

So it is with God our heavenly Father. God welcomes every gift, small and large, given with hands and hearts of love. The One who takes the loaves and fishes of a small boy and feeds thousands is still the One who welcomes our gifts as treasures. We are wise to remember that the boy gave our Lord his **entire** lunch. When this nameless boy turned over his lunch to Jesus, he gave everything he had. Yes, God welcomes the sacrificial gifts we give.

Second, these stories also suggest **we have more to give than we think.** When the boy heard Andrew tell Jesus about his lunch, I suspect he thought for a moment Andrew had lost his mind.

No one could take his small lunch and feed even another two people, much less thousands. But Jesus saw the boy's resources differently. When our Lord took the loaves and fishes and offered thanks, God transformed a box lunch into a feast.

Think **not**, that the little you have to give is unimportant to God. The story suggests we first give God what we have, believing He will take our gift and supersize it for His glory.

Third, **given to God, little becomes much**. Scan the pages of the Bible and see over and over again how God takes the little we give and transforms it into much.

Whether it is Gideon's small army staring down thousands or David's small stones in a handmade slingshot, God takes the little we give and magnifies it in ways none of us can imagine.

In a culture that makes much of **grandness**, God exalts **smallness**. God invites us at every turn in life's road to give sacrificially what we have.

Imagine how your work would be transformed if you decided to give colleagues the small gift of encouragement, knowing God would make it great. With God, little is much.

And finally, **leftovers abound in God's Kingdom**. This "leftover" aspect of our story is most intriguing. See 12 disciples doubting they would have even a small tidbit of good food to eat discovering they had 12 baskets of leftovers on which to feast.

Do you see it? Haven't you thought the same thing? Never underestimate the power and presence of God to take the sacrificial little we give, multiply it, and then create so much, that even more is falling out of our hungry hands.

In God's Kingdom, **leftovers** are not scraps, but a feast! In God's economy, there is no shortage of nourishing food to pass around, no fear of not having enough.

Leftovers! It's how God takes what we give and blesses a hungry world. So count your blessings! What would Jesus Do? Amen.