

## The Attitude of Sufficiency

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How do you think Jesus did it? How did he feed 5,000 people with only five loaves of bread and two fish? (Mark 6:30-44) Some literal interpreters of this story claim that Jesus somehow magically multiplied the meager loaves and small fish, while other interpreters tell us that early church stories like this and stories like walking on the water were told to back up the church's claim that Jesus of Nazareth was the long-awaited messiah. But theologian and activist Meghan McKenna suggests another way to understand what the miracle is in this amazing story. Here's what she thinks.

As we enter the story, Jesus has just learned of John the Baptist's death. He is trying to get off by himself...he wants to be alone for a little while. And who can blame him? Remember, John was not only his second cousin – his mother and John's mother were cousins – but the man who baptized him as well.

But there is something else. His and John's lives and their ministries were intimately tied together. Therefore, in the midst of his personal grief, Jesus also has to deal with the fact that in all probability, he too is now in danger. For he, like John the Baptist, has been perceived by those in power as a political threat. It would make sense for Jesus to lay low for a while...to stay out of sight and not risk being the next one to go.

But the story tells us that Jesus was unsuccessful in his getaway attempt. When the villagers heard the news that John had been beheaded, they set off on foot to get Jesus before it was too late. We know from Jesus' response that they must have been a pathetic-looking bunch: sick, lame, women and children along with the men.

We also know that Jesus' heart must have gone out to the crowd because even though he knew it was dangerous to do so, he left the safety of his boat and moved out among the crowd and to cure those who were sick.

What was this crowd like that Jesus should take such a risk? That is a new question for this text, for when the focus is on the magical powers of Jesus...what the crowd is like or who is in the crowd is not important...

I'd like to zero in on the women for a moment. Who were they? What did they look like? What were they wearing? We only have to look at the evening news on TV to find an answer to the last two questions, for women there and then, as is still the case in occupied territories such as the West Bank, wore long robe-like garments called "abayas" that covered literally every inch of their bodies. As they still are, these garments were full of pockets, pockets that could conceal almost anything from prying eyes, pockets large enough to carry adequate provisions to carry them over for days. I think there is a big clue here...

As the day grew late, the disciples urged Jesus to send the crowds home so that they could get something to eat, but Jesus refused. "There is no need to send them away," he tells the disciples, and then he adds, "feed them yourselves." How happy do you think they were to hear that? They had five loaves and two fish... just enough for the thirteen of them, and Jesus tells them to feed a crowd of 5,000?

...They tried to reason with Jesus, but he would have none of it, and so with great reluctance the disciples give up their own provisions, handing them over to Jesus as they had been told to do. With these reluctant gifts in hand, Jesus blesses the loaves and the fish, and then breaks the bread into pieces giving it back to the disciples with the order to distribute it among the crowd. How far into the crowd do you expect it went? Two or perhaps three deep? And then the real miracle happened!

Those who were with provisions watched thoughtfully as the disciples gave up everything they had with them. Then, slowly and deliberately, the pockets of those in the crowd were opened, surrendering that which had been concealed in them.

So from those hidden pockets in the "abayas" came bread for sure, perhaps wine, maybe some fruit. Men, women and children sharing what they had with one another. What a sight it must have been! And when they had eaten their fill, it took twelve baskets to hold the leftovers...the story tells us that when those who *have* share with those who *have not*, there is enough left over to feed the whole world. Is that not the real miracle?

Like Megan McKenna, I believe that when mothers, sisters and grandmothers, who struggle daily to feed their families, share what little they have with those who have even less it is miraculous.

My friends, this story is not about charity. It is not about people who have a lot, sharing their abundance. It is about people who don't have much, sharing from what they have and making a difference. This is a story about how compassion inspires people to move beyond a mindset of scarcity – that we don't have enough – to a new attitude of sufficiency.

“Feed them yourselves,” Jesus tells the disciples. The disciples protest that there isn't enough. But Jesus doesn't buy into their mindset of scarcity. He knows there is more than enough food to go around, *if* everyone shares what they have. He believes in sufficiency, and his example invites us to avoid the myth of scarcity, and instead believe in sufficiency.

Last Sunday our CCC Search Team had us working to answer the question: “Who is God calling us to be in this time?” I suggest that Meghan McKenna's interpretation of Jesus feeding the five thousand provides a believable answer: We are called to be a congregation that believes passionately in sufficiency and are willing to give what we have so that others may be fed, clothed and receive affordable healthcare; so that immigrants and refugees may be met with hospitality instead of hostility; so that the earth is cared for and redeemed, rather than ravaged for profit. We believe in sufficiency, and we will continue to do as Jesus asked the disciples: “There is no need to send them away...feed them.”

Lynn Twist, the co-founder of the Pachamama Alliance and the founder of The Soul of Money Institute, has dedicated her life to alleviating poverty and hunger and helps us see the possibilities:

*When you let go of trying to get more of what you don't really need, which is what we're all trying to get more of, it frees up immense energy to make a difference with what you have. When you make a difference with what you have, it expands.*

Let the people say “Amen.”

## Closing Poem

### **Manna for the Multitudes**

Bill Eichhorn

The grisly execution of his beloved cousin  
John the Baptist told him  
he could be next.

He sought safe seclusion by a lake  
with his friends – a place where  
he could grieve, pray and plan.

But they had walked long  
for his teaching, for him to touch  
the sick, the lame, people with no hope.

So he went out and met them,  
gave them what they needed –  
parables of resistance, healing and hope.

And then, at the end of the day,  
when they were hungry,  
he fed them all –

asking his doubting disciples to share  
with the people all they had –  
five loaves and two fish.

Seeing this, the women reached into  
the deep pockets inside their long black cloaks  
for fruit and fish, for the bread and wine.

As Jesus ate  
with his astounded disciples, he thought:  
Just like manna in the wilderness.