

10 Pentecost, Proper 12

July 29, 2018

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

2 Kings 4:42-44

God provides beyond what the people need.

Ephesians 3:14-21

God through power working in us accomplishes abundantly more than we can imagine

John 6:1-21

Jesus fed 5,000; rejected being made King; walked on water

Elisha's servant thought that 20 loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain were too little to feed 100 people. But Elisha made it to be more than enough. Andrew thought that the 5 barley loaves and 2 fish were not enough to feed the 5,000, but Jesus made it to be more than enough. Paul wrote to the Ephesians about God's ability to accomplish abundantly far more than we can imagine. But how hard it is sometimes for us to recognize abundance.

Sometimes we think about scarcity of money to do what we want. Yesterday I spoke at the memorial service of a member of my former parish in San Jose. I spoke about three of Jim's passions: woodworking, bargaining for a good deal, and caring for the homeless. For the past 17 years that I've known Jim, he was retired. But before that he was a traveling salesman selling automotive parts. He made a modest income, and lived modestly. But in the church, he used his woodworking to build tables for the sanctuary, a ten foot high Celtic cross for the front lawn, and small wall crosses for me to use for house blessings. He used his bargaining skills to arrange with the local Kohls store manager to hold for him any overstock of socks, scarves, knit hats, or gloves for the homeless. Jim paid \$5 for each box of clothes, which he put in the trunk of his car and took directly to the homeless shelter to hand out. He and a few helpers got so busy with this work that we opened a clothing closet that the parish members contributed to all year long; to be prepared when cold weather came around each Fall. I talked about Jim having little – but always asking God to make what he did have into an important ministry. He taught me a big lesson about living from a sense of abundance rather than scarcity. It had to do with Jim offering to God what he was passionate about.

Sometimes we think about the abundant jobs other people have that we missed out on. I have held a few jobs in my lifetime, and I have considered lots of other jobs – TV repair shop, Border Patrol, veterinarian, lawyer – to name a few. But I have learned that what is so much more important than the social scale position of a job, is whether I personally find passionate fulfillment in my job. Someone once asked me about my decision to take up ministry. What did I find so compelling about a job that requires a 50-60 hour work week, and being on call 24/7. I told him that I feel a deep sense of blessing to be integrated into families for a time - planning with parents to baptize their child; meeting with teenagers to prepare them for Confirmation; blessing people's pets; lighting candles and praying for people when they are sick; and planning and presiding services to celebrate the lives of beloved ones who have passed away. And there have been lots of times three or four of those things have been going on at the same time. I see God's power at work over

and over again to give me the time I need, and words to say, and the skills to make these people's lives better for a time – certainly beyond any ability or knowledge that is my own. God provides abundantly beyond what I have been 'taught'. My sense of abundance comes out of my use of gifts I am passionate about.

Sometimes we might feel a scarcity of meaningful friendships. I am constantly struck by the conversations around the coffee table after Sunday services here, when people are sharing stories about friends they have— friends they went to grade school with. Friendships that last that long take a mix of determination, time invested, and God-incidents that help you stay connected. I have to tell you that in my corporate career those friendships are rare. I can tell you after living in San Jose for 35 years that those friendships are rare. But I do have a few friendships that are lifelong – and I owe those friendships to God's abundance.

In the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000, I wonder if the compassion Jesus felt was not about the crowd's hunger for food, but was about their hunger to learn about God from him. The crowd didn't seem to care that it was late at night. They wanted to stay to hear Jesus teach them... They had developed a passion for learning more about God than they already knew. Jesus filled their tummies, but he also filled their spiritual hunger with abundance.

Jesus' teachings are about compassion, love, caring for others, and having passion in our relationship with God. The Book of Revelation warns us to not be lukewarm about our relationship with God. God wants passionate followers. The readings today highlight how God's abundance is available to all of us – for the things that really matter – when we offer to God the things we are passionate about.

There is a verse in the Ephesians passage today that is very powerful, and summarizes today's message so very well. It is in our Prayer Book on page 102, and is one of three dismissal to be used in the Morning Prayer Office. Please turn to page 102 and say with me the last paragraph on that page:

Glory to God, whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. AMEN.

Like Elisha's servant, like the boy on the hillside, you and I are to offer whatever skills or resources we have, however inadequate we may feel they are, and then depend on God to make our offering abundant. I have experienced that abundance in my life. I have witnessed God's abundance in the things that really matter in other people's lives. Consider how you might take what you are passionate about in your life, and use it as an offering to God – and then see what happens. Amen