

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost July 25, 2021

2 Kings 4:42-44; John 6:1-21

Throughout this summer, we have been hearing about some of the prophets from the Hebrew Scriptures. Ezekiel, Amos, Jeremiah. Each has had a specific call, often to correct the people of Israel when they wander from their calling to follow God alone. When they worship other gods and when they ignore the plight of the weakest and poorest among them.

This week, we hear something of the story of the prophet Elisha. He is closely linked to Elijah (who we will hear from later) because Elisha was Elijah's chosen successor. While Elisha, too, is focused on proclaiming the way of God among the Israelites, most of the stories about Elisha seem to be miracles that seek to authenticate that he really does speak for God. In this chapter we get five of those miracles. Each comes out of a time of famine and scarcity and shows God providing for God's people. For the first miracle, a widow who cannot pay her debts and consequently has her two sons threatened with enslavement, comes to Elisha and out of her scarcity he provides a means for the widow to pay the debt (2 Kings 4:1-7). The second miracle concerns Elisha's prophecy that a childless couple would have a child (4:8-17). The third depicts the revival of the child after an illness and death (4:18-37). In the fourth miracle, Elisha successfully detoxified a pot of stew that had been rendered poisonous, for his group of prophets (4:38-41). He had to do this because they did not have enough food to just make another pot. The fifth miracle, the one we hear today, is about Elisha's ability to feed a hundred people with, like the story from

John, what doesn't seem like enough. But, as God says through the prophet Elisha, let them eat and they shall have some left. And they do.

We are not always so good about discerning when things are truly scarce and when there is actually enough, are we? Do you remember the toilet paper days? The fears early on last year about not having enough. I know I felt it, we all felt it. And how many of us have leftover hand sanitizer from that first batch more than a year ago? Or even toilet paper? There are a lot of reasons for that kind of reaction, most of them psychological and not practical, we tend to believe there won't be enough. I saw it time and again growing up living in hurricane prone country. Where hoarding of resources meant that some had more than they could use and some didn't have any. But if they had all just taken what they needed, there would have been enough.

Jesus points out in the gospels that evil intentions come from within. From the human heart. From our own desires and fears. These drive us to look to ourselves first, our family, our tribe, and disregard the needs of others and ignore their humanity. The very relationship that God is always calling us to.

The story from 2 Kings and our Gospel reading from John both have an incredible number of people being fed by what seems to be not enough; five loaves and two fish, twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain. Yet when they are shared, there is more than enough, and some left over. Why?

There might well have been some mysterious multiplication of the loaves, a replication of the very fabric of their essence that created more. God could do that. But in many ways, I think the greater miracle would be that in the sharing, God transformed the hearts of those who were present and unwilling to share with one another. That when they saw the example set by the young boy, and Elisha, the Holy Spirit moved them to share what they had. Which led to the next person to share, and so on. And as each shared their little bit, it added up to enough to fill everyone and collect leftovers.

It is amazing what God can do with our “little bit”, whether that is a financial offering or our talents or time. What God calls us to is to share those “little bits” and trust that God will make of them an abundance greater than the sum of their parts.

It's like the European folk story of *Stone Soup*, once upon a time, there was a great war. The people in one small village were afraid their families would go hungry, so they hid the small amounts of food they did have- even from each other. T. One day a wanderer came into the village. He asked the different people he met about finding something to eat and a place to sleep for the night.

"There's not a bite to eat in the whole county," they told him. "You better keep moving on."

"Oh, I have everything I need," he said. "In fact, I would like to make some stone soup to share with all of you." He pulled a big black cooking pot from his wagon. He filled it with water and built a fire under it. Then, he reached

slowly into his knapsack and, while several villagers watched, he pulled a plain gray stone from a cloth bag and dropped it into the water. When asked about it, he said he was making stone soup.

By now, hearing about the magic stone, most of the villagers were surrounding the man and his cooking pot. As he sniffed the stone soup and licked his lips, the villagers began to overcome their lack of trust.

"Ahh," he said aloud to himself, "I do like a tasty stone soup. Of course, stone soup with cabbage is even better."

Soon a villager ran from his house into the village square, holding a cabbage. "I have this cabbage from my garden," he said as he held it out for the man.

"Fantastic!" he cried. He cut up the cabbage and added it to the pot. "You know, I once had stone soup with cabbage and a bit of beef, and it was delicious."

Another villager said he thought he could find some beef scraps. As he ran back to his shop, other villagers offered bits of vegetables from their own gardens--potatoes, onions, carrots, celery. Soon the big black pot was bubbling and steaming. When the soup was ready, everyone in the village ate a bowl of soup, and it was delicious, and there were leftovers.

The villagers offered the man money and other treasures for the magic stone, but he refused to sell it. He had many offers for a cot to sleep on that night. The next day he traveled on his way. As he left, he handed the cloth

bag to a child as he left the village and whispered, “It was not the stone which performed the magic. It was all of us together.”

When we, as the church, can muster enough courage to share our little bits, this is when God can do some amazing things. When we can become a sign of the reign of God on earth. Hope Lutheran in Cedar Rapids, a small church which has struggled to stay afloat financially, began offering daily meals during the derecho clean up. Because people were hungry and they had a little bit to offer. Their pastor told me how many people appreciated that simple, hot meal, how they began getting donations from people to keep offering those meals. How volunteers just kept showing up to help.

We had 36 plus people this past week throw just a little bit of their own into the pot to make VBS. A little bit of time. A little bit of knowledge and talent. A little bit of money. And we proclaimed the good news of God in Jesus Christ to 50 plus children in our community.

The promise of God is that there is always enough for everyone to have what they need and that the little bit that we have God can do amazing things with. God always works on both sides of the coin. If you have a bit to share and you share it, God will make sure that is enough. If you need something, God will supply you with enough.

And the only way this happens is through community. When we stick together. When we share with those who don't have enough. And suddenly, there is enough and more than enough.

What are the ways we as a church, St. John, can help make sure that the poorest in our community, the ones who are trying hard but just can't catch a break, can finally have enough? Enough so that the broken-down car won't send the whole house of cards tumbling down. Enough so that the medical bill won't ruin them. Enough so they can eat healthy food. So that they have a roof over their heads. So, they have the means to work and earn a living and not have to worry about their kids. How are we equipped and called by God to share our little bit, to be generous with what God has first given us- ourselves, our time, our talents, our possessions- so that others may have what they need?

The God we worship is always taking little bit and making it enough and more than enough. We see that in this Meal laid out for us today. A little bit of bread, a little bit of wine, will feed us all with leftovers. Feed us with the very Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus who came to open our eyes to God's abundance. Who died and rose again to free us from all that binds us- including the fear that there is not enough.

So come today, to receive this bit of bread and sip of wine and be freed to go into this world and share your "little bit" and see what wonders God can do.