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All Scripture quotations are NIV, unless otherwise indicated.

John 6:1-15

More Than Enough

Story about Dominican Republic: children's ministry. There was enough...and leftover.

Story about Haiti: young people's conference. There was enough...and leftover.

You truly need to experience not enough for the miracle of more than enough to become visible.

Ever since Jesus began his ministry in Galilee, the crowds have been following him. No matter where Jesus goes or what he does, the nameless crowds seek him out. They come because they are sick, because they are blind, because they are paralyzed. They come because they have leprosy or because they are held captive by demons. They come because they are broken-hearted or afraid. They come because hope is in short supply and they are desperate for good news.

These people live in a world where there is not enough to go around. They are accustomed to running on empty.

There is not enough order in the chaos, so the Roman Empire enforces order at the point of a sword.

There is not enough food, so the elite classes enjoy what they can while they can in elaborate parties. Everyone else struggles from day to day and season to season.

There is not enough economic opportunity, so a tiny percentage of the population knows what it is to have money to burn. Most everyone else works hard--really hard--just trying to make ends meet.

There is not enough honor to go around, so people look for opportunities to knock someone else down a peg so that they might rise just a little bit.

There is not enough of anything. Everyone knows that the mathematics of this world require that if one person gains then another person loses.

The crowds that follow Jesus are full of people who are losing at the mathematics of this world. No matter where Jesus goes or what he does, the crowds come to Jesus with their needs and their hungers.

This day is supposed to be different. This day is supposed to be a rest day. It doesn't happen though. The crowds follow them. Out in the middle of nowhere, thousands of people gather.

Look closely, and you will recognize some of them. Some are sick; some are blind; some are paralyzed. Some have leprosy or are held captive by demons. Some are broken-hearted or afraid. Hope is in short supply, and they are searching for good news.

The main thing that brings these people together is their shared need. Each family is preoccupied with its own hunger. Each person is preoccupied with his or her own emptiness. Society has long ago run out of what they need. They want to get to this man whom they've heard so much about before he runs out too.

When Luke tells this story, he says that Jesus has compassion for the crowd. He walks among them. He touches them. He speaks to them. He heals them. He teaches them. The part about feeding them comes later.

When John tells this story, as the fourth in his series of seven signs, he gets right to the feeding miracle. The crowd is large, the day is short, and Jesus provides more than enough.

This is a turning point in Jesus' ministry. Always before, Jesus had compassion on the crowds and walked among them and healed the sick, but at the end of the day everyone was on their own for dinner. This day turns out to be different. This day there is dinner for 5000 plus.

The feeding of the 5000 is the most socially and politically revolutionary act of Jesus' ministry to this point. In this event, Jesus proclaims loud and clear that the Kingdom of God is indeed at hand, and in the Kingdom of God there is more than enough! There is enough bread. There is enough fish. There is enough Jesus. There is enough. In a world where so many people's lives have been shaped and bounded by the experience of never enough, Jesus declares loud and clear that, in the Kingdom of God, there is more than enough.

The disciples want to evaluate their limited resources and be frugal; they are thinking according to the mathematics of this world. Jesus wants them to respond to what is needed; he is working according to the mathematics of the Kingdom of God.

The disciples count five loaves and two fish. Clearly there is not enough for so many people. “How far will they go?” Andrew asks the question that is on all the disciples’ minds. They are thinking according to the mathematics of this world.

Jesus doesn’t answer the question. He takes action. Jesus takes the five loaves and the two fish. He blesses them. He gives them to the disciples to distribute among the crowd. Everybody gets as much as they want. Jesus is working according to the mathematics of the Kingdom of God.

After everyone was satisfied, Jesus told his disciples to gather the leftovers: twelve baskets full of broken pieces leftover from the five barley loaves. This day the mathematics of this world gave way to the mathematics of the Kingdom of God. The more that was given away, the more there was to give.

In the feeding of the 5000 plus, there was a miracle, there was a mystery, and there was a command.

The miracle was that 5000 plus people were fed by five loaves and two fish.

This miracle points back to the Exodus stories of a God who always provided enough. When manna came from heaven to feed the Israelites in the wilderness, some gathered more and some gathered less. When they measured it, those who had gathered much had nothing left over, and those who gathered little had no shortage. There was enough.

This miracle points forward to the Last Supper and Jesus’ death. The One who was without sin was broken so that all who are broken with sin might be made whole. It is enough.

The mystery was that a crowd of individuals preoccupied with their own emptiness was transformed into a community of people focused on Jesus, the One who had more than enough so that all could be filled.

We experience the mystery every time we gather around the Lord’s Table. We don’t come alone, or as family groups, or even as one congregation. We take our places with Abraham and Sarah, Elijah and Moses. Our dinner companions include people who were fed one day long ago by five barley loaves and two fish, the 120 followers of Jesus who gathered in Jerusalem after Jesus ascended to heaven, saints and martyrs throughout the centuries, and a great cloud of witnesses who have called Timber Ridge home for generations. We come to the Table with our own

hunger and emptiness. At the Table, we are formed into one community in Christ.

In the feeding of the 5000 plus, there was a miracle, there was a mystery, and there was a command.

Did you hear the command? Luke spells it out at the beginning of the meal—Jesus tells his disciples, “You give the something to eat.” John emphasizes the command at the end of the meal: “Gather the pieces that are left over.”

At the beginning...at the end...either way...Jesus commands his disciples to join him in ministering to the crowd. He commands them to give to him all that they have. Then he gives it back to them to share. The more that is given away, the more there is. They gather the leftovers. After giving away all that they have, they end up with even more to give.

The mathematics of this world haven't changed. Everyone still knows there is not enough of anything; if one person gains then another person loses. Disciples of Jesus are still surrounded, near and far, by people who are losing at the mathematics of this world. Some are sick. Some are poor. Some are oppressed. Some can't shake their demons. Some are broken-hearted or afraid. Hope is in short supply, and people are desperate for good news. For Jesus' disciples, it's still easy to look around at all the need and be overwhelmed...paralyzed by the hunger (physical and relational and spiritual) that surrounds us.

Jesus still commands us to join him in ministering to the crowd. It's still tempting for disciples of Jesus to want to evaluate our limited resources and be frugal. We tend to think according to the mathematics of this world. Jesus still wants us to respond to what is needed; he works according to the mathematics of the Kingdom of God.

It's still tempting for disciples of Jesus to count our meager assets and conclude that it cannot be done; we are not enough. We tend to think according to the mathematics of this world. Jesus still takes what we have and gives it back to us to share. He is enough. He works according to the mathematics of the Kingdom of God.

The mathematics of the Kingdom of God haven't changed either. The Kingdom of God is indeed at hand, and in the Kingdom of God there is more than enough! The more that is given away, the more there is to give.

Everyone had enough to eat, and the disciples gathered twelve baskets of leftover pieces. Thanks be to God.