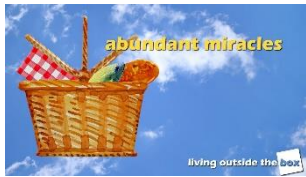




abundant miracles



Our scripture today is from the gospel of Matthew. Jesus has told the disciples several parables. We have listened to them in the last 3 weeks. Jesus goes to his home town of Nazareth where he experiences rejection. On top of that, Jesus receives the news that his cousin John the Baptist has been beheaded. Listen now to what comes next.

<Matthew 14:13-21>

13 Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. 14 When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. 15 When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." 16 Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." 17 They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." 18 And he said, "Bring them here to me." 19 Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. 20 And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. 21 And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

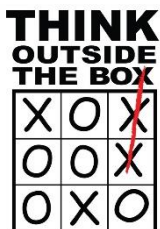


My first degree is in Mathematics and I have to admit that my logical mind tends to agree with disciples! My mind is bounded by a **box (or a picnic basket)**. It is quite simple. This is all I have and it is not going to feed all of you! Logic says: send the crowd home – turn them away; look at our budget – it would take 8 months wages to feed that many – we can't do it.



Jesus is not boxed in. That's not how Jesus thinks – he relies on the power of God. Jesus simply says "what do you have?" and then he blesses it and returns it to them, and not only is it enough, but there is abundance.

There is a president of a company who has a sign on his desk that reads: "Never promise them pie in the sky until you see the bakery truck coming down the street."¹



Perhaps Jesus would have swept the sign off desk. Too safe/logical for Jesus. Jesus relies on the **power** of God. He is more of an entrepreneur and risk-taker, out ahead of us, confidently calling us forward to be more than we think we can be by the grace of God. Jesus thinks outside the box.

¹ As quoted by <http://www.sermonsuite.com/free.php?i=788019610&key=lqumgownrQ7dqnO6>.



OR Perhaps Jesus makes his outlandish promises because he can see the bakery truck in the distance. **He knows what the power of God unleashed in the midst of a giving people can do.** He knows how to live outside of the box.

“What have you got?” He asks.

“Not much.” Our reply.

“More than you think.” He says, “Work with what you have – bring it to me.”

And the miracle happens.



Was this a miracle of multiplication – in the quantity of the loaves or a miracle of division of the bread as it was broken? By breaking the bread did Jesus break open the disciples and the crowd’s capacity? Was the miracle in the transformation of their hearts making them more fully themselves, and in so-doing there was not just enough but abundance?

As I said earlier, two things have just happened to Jesus. He had traveled to Nazareth where he was raised, and preached there, but it did not go well. So I imagine he came away mentally bruised and hurting at the rejection. And then Jesus received the news that his friend John the Baptist had died. It was a brutal death and the hands of the Empire. John was in prison and the order was given to chop his head off. John was Jesus’ second cousin; - their mums Elizabeth and Mary were cousins and were pregnant with them at the same time. John & Jesus probably played together as young boys. John had baptized Jesus at the start of Jesus’ ministry.



Jesus must have been devastated and grieving John’s death. It would have been the right moment to lock himself away and grieve. The time to go into a box and shut out the world. So, Jesus got in a boat, that’s a box, and went off to a deserted place.

The crowd also heard the gruesome news and they were probably fearful themselves. They go seeking Jesus for comfort and guidance and spot his boat. Jesus comes ashore and sees a great crowd. He sees their grief. He sees their fear. He sees their longing for hope and a word of encouragement, and he has **compassion** on them. Even within his own grief and wanting to close in, he gets out of the box. He knows what they are feeling, so he reaches out and heals their sick. He spends the day in conversation with them and night begins to fall. And everyone is hungry. The disciples do not want to deal with the problem. Send them home, they say. And Jesus says, **“They need not go home.”**

I’m quoting now from what Liz Forney said in the *Feasting on the Gospels* commentary:²

They need not go away. *It is a call to remain together in community even when the needs seem too great. In remaining together, we may find possibilities none of us could create alone, and surely we will find comfort and companionship in sharing the experience, be it hunger or cold.*

The other half of his command, “You give them something to eat,” is a profound shift in responsibility. Frequently Jesus himself has done the healing and transforming, but in this moment he calls the disciples to step up and reject the myth of scarcity. Although at first the disciples are still paralyzed by fear and stuck in their limited human imaginations, Jesus is patient with them. They balk and protest about limited resources. There is not nearly

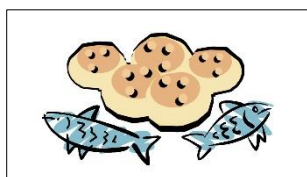
² Liz Barrington Forney, “Matthew 14:13-21- Homiletical Perspective” in Cynthia A. Jarvis and E. Elizabeth Johnson, *Feasting on the Gospels: Matthew*, Volume 2A (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 11-13.

enough to go around. There is no way this can work out. They seem to have forgotten the many miracles they have already witnessed.

We know this intersection in our lives so well. We know the familiar feeling of being overwhelmed by what is expected of us. The needs that surround us seem insurmountable. ... and beyond our resources to respond. We revert to our own narrow minds, forgetting the expanse and freedom promised by God. So paralyzed by anxiety are we, that we forget the thousand other times that God entered in unexpectedly and made a way when there seemed no way.

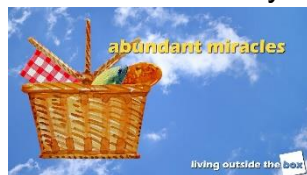
Jesus said. “You provide the bread, let me take care of the miracle.”

Faith tells us that the antidote to the toxic doses of fear and blaring messages of insufficiency is found in taking the meager bits and pieces of what we have and inviting Jesus to bless them and make them more.



We have to give God something to work with. **What do our 5 loaves and 2 fish look like?** Perhaps it is a word of hope, or a helping hand, a flickering of a talent we have – music, sewing skills, letter-writing, storytelling, gardening, etc. What do we have in our hands? However small, God can bless it when we offer it.

I wouldn't be standing here today if someone hadn't nudged me and said you've got something to offer. There's many times when I still think my paltry gifts are way too small and yet when people come back and say "You touched my life – it made a difference" then I know God has performed a miracle.



Jesus can work miracles with 5 loaves and 2 fish. We've seen that. We know that. Yet we often fail to claim it for ourselves. Transformative miracles can happen in our lives too. So expect transformative miracles in your own life & in this community. The promise is not just there for everyone else. It's there for us too.

Let's think outside of our boxes and be filled with the compassion of Jesus. And let's offer our five loaves and two fish, whatever they may be.

Thanks be to God.
Amen.

Resources

Jarvis, Cynthia A. and E. Elizabeth Johnson. *Feasting on the Gospels: Matthew*, Volume 2A. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013.

Series Description

We try to box God in, but God is always breaking out of the box and shattering our understandings of life in God's kingdom.