

## *Hidden Abundance Revealed*

*John 6:1-14 – Loaves and Fishes*

We are entering the time of gratitude here at Robertson-Wesley, which is why you are going to see Spritely everywhere. They like to create mischief to inspire and to give thanks for all that you are and all that you bring.

Today, the story we heard in the Gospel is about hidden abundance – hidden abundance that is revealed. When Jesus looked out at the crowd that had gathered, that had been following to hear what he was teaching, he looked out at the crowd and then felt compassion, as it was coming time for the Passover meal. Jesus wanted to nourish their bodies as well as their souls. As a wise leader, he understood that people listen better when they're fed.

Did you know that this particular Gospel story is found in all four Gospels? It's found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But John's version is slightly different than the others. In John's version, we see – as Jay put – the cheeky side of Jesus. Jesus decided to test the disciples. He asked the disciples to look out at the crowd and to feed them. What did the disciples see? Does anybody remember in the story what the disciples saw when they looked out at the crowd at first? (*People respond*) Lots of people. Now, Jesus wanted to feed them, and what did they see? No food. In fact, Phillip, one of the disciples, answered Jesus and said, "You know what? Six months' wage would not be enough to buy bread for everyone to have even a little bit."

Andrew, though, noticed that there was a child. A little boy, who happened to have five barley loaves and two fish. But even that, he thought, wouldn't go very far. So Jesus said, "I want you to take the thousands of people and have them sit down." Which I'm sure took a little bit of time. As they all started to sit down, Jesus took one of the loaves of bread and the fish that were gathered, and he blessed the bread. He gave thanks to God for what had been revealed.

After giving thanks, he told the disciples to take the bread and the fish out to the people and to share it with them. And to have as much as they needed. And so they did. As time progressed, Jesus said, “Now I want you to go out into the crowd and gather up the leftovers.” What was left? (*People respond*) Lots of leftovers. Twelve baskets’ full. The miracle of the story was that everyone had all that they wanted and needed, and even when gathered up, there was more.

The story always reminds me of church potlucks. The number of times we decide we are going to have a potluck and the people who are organizing it panic. What happens if...? We only get desserts? What happens if there is not enough food? What if...no one brings this, and what if nobody brings that, and what inevitably happens at a potluck? There is so much food that in the end, we don’t know what we are going to do with the leftovers. A very similar concept.

What Jesus did in this story in my mind was that he revealed to the people that God doesn’t always ask in the way that we expect. God surprises us. When we trust in God and when we have faith in God’s love and compassion, what is transformed is our own expectations. Our human expectations. Which often, like the disciples, see the scarcity instead of the abundance that is amongst us.

Recently, at our community dinner for Thanksgiving, we were cooking a lot of turkeys. And what happened that particular day was that people got sick and a bunch of other people suddenly had things and they couldn’t come and so we started to panic, thinking there was no way we were going to be able to cook all of this food. So I jumped in and started cutting some bread and some other people showed up and they jumped in and started cutting up the carrots...and and suddenly, there were people who had never helped who appeared and started cooking the carrots. More and more people showed up and were able to serve. And then even *more* people showed up and we were able to clean up. We fed over 140 people. Again, in that moment, when we started that, even the week before we were like, “We don’t have enough volunteers.” We don’t have enough. And in the end, when people came together and worked together, we had more than enough. An abundance of help. People left fed and joyful and filled.

When we started today, this was empty. [The water pitcher] And now, it is overflowing. Through his action, Jesus and his faith revealed the abundance that was hidden from the eyes of the disciples. I wonder what this place would look like if we, the faithful followers of Christ, deliberately shared in Jesus' goal of revealing God's power through each act of ministry. If you were to think about the community dinner and serving all those people as Christ revealing, to everyone who was there, the power of God, the love of God, how would that change how we work together? If everything we do is done to reveal what is hidden in our midst? The Holy Spirit, God's love and compassion.

We need to think about what motivates us to serve and to live out our call together. What motivates us to share our abundance. I believe that often, what happens is we become so full from what we receive from worshipping together. What we receive in our friendships and in feasting with one another, and we receive so much when we serve others, when we know that what we are giving has value and is making a difference in this world. I believe – and I can't tell you the number of times when I felt empty – and then like Jesus, what happens after this story, when Jesus fed all those people, do you know where he went? He went off on his own to the mountain to be refilled. We all need to be refilled and we do that by coming here to worship. As we are filled, we overflow, and that's how we serve one another.

So, here's the challenge for the day: we are going to invite you...and for some, I know this is uncomfortable. But – we are going to invite you to gather into groups of five or six and we want you to come up with a six-word story that answers this question: "What abundance in our midst is being revealed to us today?" What abundance in our midst is being revealed today? So, Jay and I are going to run around. If you can make little clusters...make sure you look around so that everyone is a part of this. Imagine that you are on that hill with Jesus and Jesus is saying to you, "I want you to write a six-word story." You have about four minutes to do this. Move quickly, my friends. Move quickly.

*(People gather and talk)*

Alright, we are gathering up the last of the abundance here – or the beginning of the abundance. Jay and Dirk: you have some stories already. Do you want to some of these stories already with us?

*Dirk*: I would be glad to. Somebody's very careful to get exactly six words... "We filled in the gaps together." Jay, do you want to tag-team?

*Jay*: "Reconciliation is about depth and forgiveness."

*D*: "Dead leaves are the future's fertilizer."

*J*: "Love burst from hearts out the doors."

*D*: "And the crowd ate a miracle."

*J*: "Wisdom and gratitude working together uplifts us."

*D*: "Love carrying community, caring friendship, give thanks."

*K*: "We are experiencing God's gifts together."

*J*: "We share music with the people."

*D*: "In our midst, what is revealed to us today..." Okay, that was a preamble. Nice way to get around the six-word rule. "Gratitude, abundance, sings, dances in our lives forever."

*K*: "Robertson-Wesley provides an abundance of care for us."

*J*: "Music of the bells and choir."

*D*: "We are curious, playful and learning." Nicely done, six words.

*K*: "People coming together to share community."

*J*: "Watch the sun go down, down."

*D*: "We are willing to show talent."

*K*: "Abundance, diversity, musical gifts presented today."

*J*: "We are blessed to have community spirit."

*J*: "The love of all our friends."

*K*: "The joy of music amazes us." Nice.

*J*: "Youth, support, hope, belonging, love and life."

So, let us just take in all of the abundance that we have heard, knowing that God always gives us more than we can ask or imagine. As we take some time to meditate and listen.