

Hunger and Hope

2 Kings 4:42-44

Psalm 145: 10-18

John 6:1-21

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2 Kings 4:42-44

A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, "Give it to the people and let them eat." But his servant said, "How can I set this before a hundred people?" So he repeated, "Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the Lord, 'They shall eat and have some left.'" He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the Lord.

Psalm 145: 10-18

All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your faithful shall bless you. They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power, to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds. The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing. The Lord is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings. The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

John 6:1-14

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."

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"Whether we're a preschooler or a young teen, a graduating college senior or a retired person, we human beings all want to know that we're acceptable, that our being alive somehow makes a difference in the lives of others." These wise words of Fred Rogers affirm the truth that

we all seek to know that our lives have meaning, that we make a difference, no matter how young or old, not matter our gender or our race, our abilities or our inabilities.

For decades Mister Rogers was a television friend to thousands of children. His gentle spirit, his calm, attentive manner, and his welcoming kindness made children feel special, feel cared for. It seems everyone, regardless of age, knew his name, and his trademark sweater and his iconic sneakers, as well as his sweet and tender affirmation, “It’s you I like.” Everyone. He liked everyone, and everyone was special. Every day he reminded children that they were special.

In his book, “*Dear Mister Rogers, Does It Ever Rain In Your neighborhood?*,” he shared a story about a little girl named Katie and her Dad who wrote to him to ask about the fish he kept in a tank on the set of his show. Katie’s dad explained that his young daughter was blind, so she would worry and cry whenever Mister Rogers didn’t mention feeding the fish. Keeping Katie and her compassionate nature in mind, Mister Rogers made sure to always say aloud when he was feeding his fish, in case she was listening and wondering if his fish were hungry.

Mr. Rogers made sure everybody — even his fish — ate. Yet the hunger he most often fed was emotional, was spiritual, much more than physical. He connected on an individual heart level, feeding the human hunger for connection and acceptance. Shortly after his death in 2003 many tributes came out from adults who credited him for being such a tremendous part of their lives in very difficult childhood situations.

“I felt as if Mr. Rogers was the only person who liked me and accepted me just as I was. I never met him, but he is one of the most precious friends I have ever had.”

“Fred Rogers was the only truly positive male role model I had in my formative years. I’m glad he was there for me and for all of us.”

No one went hungry when Mr. Rogers was around. He set before the children the hope, calm and acceptance that they needed to feast on. To him everyone was equal, worthy, unique and a beloved child of God.

No one went hungry when Jesus was around. He set before the people the hope, the encouragement, the gospel, that they needed to feast on. To him everyone was equal, worthy, unique and a beloved child of God.

There is only one miracle story shared in all four gospels, and it is the feeding of the 5000, the feeding of the crowd who had gathered to hear Jesus teach and see, feel, him heal, and then he miraculously fed them all with five loaves of bread and two fish. It is an overwhelming thing to imagine that Jesus fed 5000 people with just a bit of bread and fish, yet in reality, he fed 10-15 thousand that evening. 5000 alone is hard to picture, let alone two or three times more. It is the population difference between Hopkinton and Hooksett, between Hillsboro and Laconia. Matthew’s gospel adds a unique fact, “those who ate were about 5000 men, besides women and children.” Scholars have determined that to count everyone who was fed that day by Jesus—fed not only with bread and fish but with the signs of spiritual hope, insight, healing, love and grace was probably 10,000 more.

While all of the gospels speak of the presence of five loaves of bread and two fish, it is only in John’s gospel that we learn that this food came from a young boy in the crowd as Andrew told Jesus, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?”

Indeed. What are they among so many people? Only John’s gospel has an answer as Jesus had tested Philip just a moment before as Jesus had asked him, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” He said this to test him, for he himself *knew what he was going to do*.

He knew what he was going to do, and it began with the simple ingredients from someone too young to ever even be counted among the crowd. Jesus was going to do what God had done when a man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, “Give it to the people and let them eat.” But his servant said, “How can I set this before a hundred people?” So he repeated, “Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the Lord, ‘They shall eat and have some left.’” He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the Lord.

A miracle occurs in this story: a sack of grain and twenty barley loaves feed one hundred people, with food remaining. A miracle occurs in the gospels: five loaves and two pieces of fish feed 15,000 people, with food remaining. They are marvels and miracles made possible by God’s overflowing abundance and grace wrapped around what two people gave. When we are tempted to think out of scarcity, God responds out of lavish generosity with what we have made available.

No matter how young or old, not matter our gender or our race, our abilities or our inabilities, all our lives have meaning, we make a difference, we are all vessels for God’s miracles.

We hunger and hope to be accepted, to make a difference. In God, in Jesus, our hunger and our hope are satisfied. Our nurturing God gives food in its due season, food that nurtures body and soul, food that sustains our lives and our spirit to satisfy the desire of every living thing. In hope and in confidence we look to Jesus whenever we are in need, trusting in love abundant goodness. Jesus fed the hungry on the hillside—those hungry not only for food, but for hope, for healing, for assurance, for forgiveness, for grace, for acceptance, and Jesus continues to feed the hungry.

The world may measure, may count, a person’s worth and abilities by gender, by income, by possessions, by abilities, but for Jesus everyone is equal, worthy, unique and a beloved child of God and we each make a difference. Thanks be to God. Amen.