

Pastor Roy's Sermon from July 29, 2012

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today we have heard two miracle stories of food being multiplied. They invite us to trust. The account from John also reminds us that prayer gives us strength to trust.

Baal is an idolatrous representation of God in Elisha's day. Baal is a god of power and strength. Here was a god who helped you to take care of yourself. If you offered the right sacrifices, took part in the proper rituals, you would succeed in your farming, with your family, even in battle. At times the faith of Israel looked very similar to the cult of Baal. The Hebrews and later the Jews often preferred believing in a power religion rather than the faith of Abraham, Moses, and the prophets. Theirs was a faith of rest and trust, practicing justice and mercy first, rather than doing whatever it takes to take care of oneself and one's own clan. The religion of Baal as well as all religion which worships power and control leads those who follow them down a path of dissatisfaction and captivity rather than freedom and joy.

In today's account, Elisha is given food from a city named for Baal. He takes the kind gift given to him, and turns it into a demonstration of the abundance of God rather than Baal. Twenty small loaves of barley and fresh grain would have been great for Elisha and a few disciples and family members, but he turns this modest gift into a demonstration of the true nature of God. This is not an offering to buy favor. Here is a chance to share abundance! God is good and there is enough good to go around. Here is generosity based on trust rather than frugal scarcity driven by fear of running out.

What do we think about when we hear miracle stories? We might think, "Wouldn't it be great to be able to multiply food, and heal people physically, mentally, and emotionally? Just to be able to lay our hands on them and make them well?" We meet people who are suffering and we want them to be well. Sometimes it is just a lack of food. . .but sometimes it is a deeply wounded childhood. . .or an overwhelming sense of loneliness and despair. Providing food is fairly simple. Healing memories and woundedness? Naturally, not so easy. Over coming that sense that I am not ok? Very difficult.

Who is God but the one who gives life and brings healing? Yet if I believe that God does not like me, or care to provide abundantly for me, how will I experience this life and healing? If I feel I must prove myself to God but fail at every attempt, I will only know failure and woundedness. I would guess that everyone here has a sense of God's love. We believe in Grace!" But somewhere in all of us there is a nagging, quiet, sense that God is frowning at us. Oh, it's even in some of our hymns. God is righteous—we are worms. It's easy to think that, after all, we are weak and driven in so many ways by fear of not enough food, not enough security, not enough love. It is very difficult to love unconditionally, unselfishly, with pure motives. --To love as Jesus loved. We know that following the one who loved in this way will involve some loving on our part, and it scares us, because sometimes we just do not feel up to it. Love and forgiveness are a challenge because they force us to challenge some of our instincts, to trust that God will take care of us when we cannot any longer.

Perhaps Elisha's first instinct was to grab the food and run when it was given as a first fruits offering. But in that moment the Spirit gave him the courage to share. Elisha had a number of chances to grab the goods and run during his ministry. But he like Jesus was faithful. They wagered on the merciful abundance of God, and I believe they won.

Where did Elisha and Jesus learn to trust and love as they did? Where did they learn to trust in God's abundance, to take chances—to believe in hope? To know that they were safe with God? Some think it was easy for Jesus to know these things. He prayed and he practiced. He plowed the narrow way and left a trail so that others might follow. It was not easy for Jesus, it wasn't easy for Elisha, and it is not easy for us. We make plenty of mistakes and there is always today to practice again. It's never too late. Yesterday's and this morning's failures to act can be buried as we weave our way into God's grace.

The miracles of today's lessons are not the multiplication of resources. The miracle is that they shared. Elisha and Jesus learned in prayer that if they could act on their faith, the miracles would happen. Trust comes first, then the experience of enough.

Do we not have enough? Let us share what we have and leave the rest in God's hands. Are we tired? Let us rest as Jesus and the children of God have, over the years, and trust that we will awaken with renewed strength to trust and hope and act with grace, in peace.

Jesus rests and prays and then goes back out to find the disciples. He finds them, they find their way ashore and all is well. God is good.

They, and we, can learn to look at life through the lenses of God's abundance, and to live life accordingly—knowing and sharing this abundance. What would have happened if they had not shared? There would have been no abundance.

So let us be satisfied with God's enough and seize the chance to share—every chance we get—especially with those who will never be able to repay us. Then we will know joy and true satisfaction. By doing so we pry our fingers off of the stuff that threatens to kill our spirits and our life. Today, we have the chance to be good stewards of the gifts God has given us. Thanks be to God who teaches us “enough” so that we might know “abundance.” Amen.