

As Much as They Want - Duke University Chapel - July 26, 2009
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John 6.1-21

Jesus says to Philip "How will we feed all these people?" This he said as a test for Philip, as Jesus already knew what he was going to do.

Philip says, basically, "It's impossible to feed all these people. We don't have the funds or the resources."

Andrew (Simon Peter's brother) says, "There is a lad who has five barley loaves and two fishes, but what good is that?"

First of all, Jesus does not need to feed these people. They are not starving. They have not been castaways on a desert island for many months. Some of them may be hungry, but none are starving. Some of them may have skipped breakfast, but that's their own fault.

Not only does Jesus not need to feed them, he doesn't even want these people around. He's left town to seek solitude from the masses, these masses. He is trying to get away from these people, but he decides to feed them, knowing full well, because he is omniscient after all, that if you feed people, they will likely stick around. So why feed them? Part of the reason is likely simple southern hospitality- even though Jesus must also know that if you feed people, they are likely to stay longer.

He wants to feed these people not because they need food in some critical way, and not because they are even asking for food, but because Jesus simply wants to show his disciples that it is possible to feed all these people, despite the lack of resources.

Jesus wants to teach his disciples, especially Philip, that because Jesus is there, in that place, then so are the means to do the impossible.

It's a faith equation:

"What, or How much do we have?" asks Christ.

"None," says Philip.

"Only this little bit," says Andrew.

"Then," says Christ, "that is as much as we need." He is saying, "If that's what we have, then that is what we need."

What you have + The presence of Christ (or faith) = As much as you need.

As with anyone, there are certain scriptures which guide my faith more than other scriptures. One of those is "Let the children come to me and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these." Math. 19.14

The "such as these" in that passage are the people who have faith like children. Children do not believe in the impossible. To a child, anything can be done, fixed, or figured out. Kid's have no sense of "enough" to get the job done. Kid's believe unfailingly in their ability to accomplish any idea they come up with. It takes an adult to crush their hopes.

Those who believe in Christ as though through Christ anything is possible are the people to whom the Kingdom of Heaven belongs. Those who believe in Christ like children are those to whom the Kingdom of Heaven belongs.

My kids see the first flake of snow drifting down from a winter cloud and they say, "Let's go sledding!" As though they could sled for hours on that lone snow flake. We adults then say, "There's not enough snow to sled." Shame on us. The problem lies in the difference in concept kids and adults have. Adults think of sledding as an activity where a well tended, sanded, waxed sled, speeds effortlessly down a hill covered with several inches of "good snow." Not too dry, not too wet. Therefore, in order to enjoy sledding, an adult must have his or her notion of "enough" snow present in order for sledding to take place.

Humbug.

Blah.

That's all way to organized and detailed for a kid. Kid's don't need "enough snow" or "good snow" to sled. They just need snow, any snow. And they don't need a perfectly maintain, sanded, and waxed sled. A garbage bag will do them just fine. An old piece of cardboard. A cafeteria food tray. All a kid needs to have fun sledding is a mildly slippery incline, gravity, and an adult with enough discretion to not tell the kids that the conditions aren't favorable for sledding. Simple as that.

How much fun can an adult have behaving like an adult in imperfect conditions? None.

How much fun can a kid in imperfect conditions, with improper equipment have? As much as they want. Kids have faith that they can have fun, and thus they do.

Kids see the world a whole different way.

They don't think in terms of "Enough wind to fly a kite," or "Enough snow to go sledding," or "Enough leaves to jump in."

To them

Some is Enough.

Simple.

And thus, to them belongs the Kingdom of Heaven.

I try to remember that even if there's not Enough there will be Some. And with Some you can make do, and if you think like the kids, and forget about Enough altogether, you can have a fine time.

Jesus thinks like a kid. "We have some, that's enough."

Philip thinks like an adult. "We got nothin'. The task is impossible."

"Ah" you argue, "but Jesus is God. Jesus can do miracles. Of course some is enough. Nothing is impossible for the Christ." Sure, that's true. But nothing is impossible for a kid either, because they have faith like Christ- and they also believe that nothing is impossible.

Andrew, the hero of the story, the catalyst, the guy who finds the fish, on the other hand, is caught somewhere in between thinking as a kid and as an adult. He says, probably in a conflicted tone, "There's a kid who has some, but it's not enough." Andrew is stuck between seeing the perfect adequacy of some, and the empty hopelessness of not enough. And this is the very idea I think Jesus is battling in this text. Jesus is battling the concept that Some cannot be Enough.

And what about the crowd? These people have come a considerable distance. The text tells us that Jesus "went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee." The Sea of Galilee is 33 miles in circumference so if we take this text literally, and certainly even we liberal, scholarly, Methodists can take at least the circumference of a sea literally, then these people have either hiked 16 1/2 miles, or boated the 8 miles across the water. Either way, they've come a goodly distance because Jesus is getting famous for his signs and healings. They're like the mobs of fans that chased the Beatles, the hordes that hound Brad Pitt and Angela Jolie. And let's be honest, I doubt that all 5000 of the people following Jesus around the lake were doing so out of deep religious devotion. Let's face it, these people wanted a show. They wanted "Israel's Got Talent." They wanted to see something cool. A healing, a casting out of demons, water into decent wine. in short, they want to see Jesus pull a rabbit from his hat. They've come to see Siegfried and Roy and they get - da da - a fish sandwich! Granted, they got plenty to eat. By the evidence of what was left over, they ate as much as they wanted, but I bet some of those people went away disappointed. Imagine the conversation, "Hey, I heard you saw Jesus. You know that guy healed my blindness by spitting in my eyes? And my buddy got his paralysis cured. What'd you get?"

"I got a sandwich."

I think the people in this story are sort of like Hollywood extras. This story is not really about them, they are necessary for the story to take place- but they aren't useful. If you

take nothing else away from this sermon, take this: Don't just be an extra. Find a way to be useful.

So we're back to Philip. Jesus starts this whole chain of events by testing Philip. "How can we feed these people?"

"We can't. It's impossible. We don't have the means. We don't have enough."

I can imagine Jesus popping Philip lovingly on the back of the head and saying, "Phil, have faith. My dad created the whole universe out of nothing at all. You don't think I can do a something special with a fish and a loaf of bread?"

So here's the test:

We, and I mean you and I, have Some. We, you and I, are Americans. Middle to upper-class Americans. We have Some. We live in a society where storage facilities are a booming business because we have too much Some to store it all at our house. We have Some.

We, you and I, have Christ.

Therefore, we, you and I, have Enough to feed everyone in the world. I'm not speaking figuratively, either. We, you and I, have Enough to feed everyone in the world as much as they want, and still have plenty left over.