

## *“Leftovers”*

Based on Psalm 145, Kings 4: 42-44 and John 6: 1-21

Delivered on July 25, 2021 at Absecon Presbyterian Church by Ruling Elder David R. Watts

Presbyterians like to eat. It is a well-known fact. We serve food at every meeting. At my church during Lent, I serve what I call “Soup and Service”. Every Wednesday our members bring soup and bread and we ask, “Do we have enough? Will we run out before the people are fed?” Isn’t that what we all say every meeting? But the truth is, there are always leftovers. Have you ever been to a meeting where someone ate the last cookie and there was just enough, or we were one short for the next person in line? Doesn’t every Presbyterian pantry include zip lock bags or take-home containers?

The reading from Kings tells of a donation of food to Elisha at the temple. Elisha says, “distribute it to the people that they may eat”. First of all, this food was meant for a temple offering and not meant for the poor. It was offered to honor Elisha, yet Elisha offers it to feed many more than the twenty barley loaves and grain can possibly feed. It may not even make a dent in their needs. It was intended to feed one, not twenty, certainly not one hundred! The servant wonders, “How can I set this before a multitude of people, this is absurd”. Yet after a blessing and prayers to the Lord, the people ate and there were leftovers, according to the reading. Like the servant, we look at our budgets, our proposals and programs. We would never consider putting a person like Elisha in charge of what food was needed for a potluck dinner. Douglas King tells us “We would never put a character, such as Elisha, in our midst. He would cause us to appear to be reaching beyond the appropriate bounds of our resources and our expectations of what we believe we can accomplish.” Yet every Church meeting and potluck dinner, we do just that, we do not know for sure how many will attend. We are called to reach beyond the common-sense measurements of this world and rely on God’s guidance to recognize the needs of the people. God’s abundant blessings often burst in upon us providing more than we had planned, more than imagined possible. Who would have thought Tina, Gay or Rick would have brought that extra Fruit or Sandwich tray, balancing just what we needed, for the extra additional attendees?

In the reading from John, we see Jesus eyeing the crowds and asking a question that tests the limits of the disciple’s knowledge, “Where are we to buy bread enough to feed these people, or how can we pay for it?” Yet Jesus seeks to feed the crowds spiritually as well as physically. Last week we spoke of Jesus’ compassion. What do we have, he asks? Whatever we have is not enough, the apostles think! Not enough, is that the final answer? When placed in the hands of Jesus, human limits become more than enough. Andrew brings him JUSTA kid and JUSTA fish. It is more than enough in his hands.

In our own world we often see overwhelming need and few resources. We feel limited by what we know, we limit ourselves, knowing what we have is not enough. That sometimes is the final answer. We believe we “do not have enough”, why should we even try to make a difference.

When our needs are placed in the hands of Jesus, what we have, may become JUSTA enough? We often fail to place our trust where it belongs. We place it instead in those with the knowledge of our limitations. This limits how far we may go and how much we may accomplish. Cheryl Bridges Johns reminds us that there are countless small congregations with few resources. There are many people with limited income and handicaps, our resources are just a drop in the bucket. Yet as this passage portrays, in the hands of Jesus, little can become much, the few will become the many and the weak will become strong. We do not need to conjure magic to believe in miracles; all we really need is what we already have. If we use what we have with a spirit of generosity, God will take care of the miracles.

The feeding of the five thousand and Jesus' walking on water are supernatural miracles that demonstrate Jesus' divine authority over the order of creation and nature. These passages establish Jesus as Lord, Creator and Redeemer. These two stories are found in all four of the Gospels, providing an occasion for Jesus to test the faith of His disciples. Phillip does the math and calculates the impossibility of feeding five thousand men and an equal number of women and children. Eight months wages would hardly pay for just the bread that is needed. It is a ridiculous situation when Andrew suggests using a child's lunch of five pita-sized pieces of bread and two salty dried fish to feed the crowds. Yet when Jesus takes them, gives thanks, blessing them, he distributes them in the fashion of the Lord's Supper. The bread multiplies and there is an abundance so that "all have enough to eat", in a world where people are never able to have their fill. We are told there were twelve baskets of leftovers gathered so that nothing would be wasted or lost. The spiritual and material care of God's flock is something miraculous, that only God can do. We often are faced by what we see as our limitations, but we need to have faith in what can be done in God's hands. With faith God can make miracles, he does it every day. In ministry we can feed our multitudes. Jesus tested the faith of those who follow Him, He is testing our faith too. God can do the impossible, He fed the five thousand, He walked on water! The disciples were paralyzed by the task of feeding so many, yet Jesus proved He was up to the task. They were terrified by Him walking on the water, but no longer of the storm. God will take what we offer and our service to Him and prove that together it is enough to make everyday miracles.

If Jesus can do so much with JUSTA kid and JUSTA fish, what can he do with what we offer? Begin with prayer, begin with a just heart, and begin with a belief in miracles. Not only will we have enough, but, as always, together we will have leftovers.

May the Grace and Peace of the Lord and the Holy Spirit be with you always, today and every day. Amen.

# Word Search Puzzle

from WhenWeWordSearch.com (use for free distribution only)

words in a straight line left to right or top to bottom



Words in the puzzle are printed in ***bold italics***.

John 6: 1-21 (NLT) After this, ***Jesus*** crossed over to the far ***side*** of the Sea of ***Galilee***, also known as the Sea of ***Tiberias***. A huge ***crowd*** kept following him wherever he went, because they saw his miraculous ***signs*** as he healed the ***sick***. Then Jesus climbed a hill and sat down with his disciples around him. (It was nearly ***time*** for the ***Jewish Passover*** celebration.) Jesus soon saw a ***huge*** crowd of people ***coming*** to look for him. Turning to ***Philip***, he asked, "Where can we buy ***bread*** to feed all these people?" He was ***testing*** Philip, for he already knew what he was going to do. Philip replied, "Even if we worked for ***months***, we wouldn't have enough ***money*** to ***feed*** them!" Then ***Andrew***, ***Simon Peter's brother***, spoke up. "There's a ***young*** boy here with five barley ***loaves*** and two fish. But what ***good*** is that with this huge crowd?" "Tell everyone to sit down," Jesus said. So they all sat down on the grassy slopes. (The ***men*** alone ***numbered*** about 5,000.) Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to ***God***, and distributed them to the people. ***Afterward*** he did the same with the ***fish***. And they all ate as much as they wanted. After everyone was ***full***, Jesus told his disciples, "Now ***gather*** the leftovers, so that nothing is ***wasted***." So they picked up the ***pieces*** and ***filled twelve*** baskets with scraps ***left*** by the people who had eaten from the five ***barley*** loaves. When the ***people*** saw him do this ***miraculous*** sign, they exclaimed, "Surely, he is the ***Prophet*** we have been ***expecting!***" When Jesus saw that they were ready to ***force*** him to be their ***king***, he ***slipped*** away into the ***hills*** by himself. That ***evening*** Jesus' ***disciples*** went down to the shore to ***wait*** for him. But as darkness fell and Jesus still hadn't come back, they got into the boat and headed across the lake toward Capernaum. Soon a gale swept down upon them, and the ***sea*** grew very rough. They had rowed three or four miles when suddenly they saw Jesus walking on the water toward the boat. They were terrified, but he called out to them, "Don't be afraid. I am here!" Then they were eager to let him in the boat, and immediately they arrived at their destination!