

I come to you in the name of one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

There is a lot of meat (if you'll excuse the phrase) to the stories of Jesus feeding great crowds. Stories about a miracle in multiplication. Stories about a miracle in sharing of what one has brought with them with the greater whole. Stories about a miracle of generosity and providence, that inspire the people to want to anoint Jesus then and there as their earthly king. But the backbone of today's version of this story speaks to me from a different place. This story, at least to me today, reveals not that Jesus can perform great miracles, turning 5 loaves and 2 fish into enough food for 5000 to have their hunger satisfied and still have 12 basket fulls left over, but rather points us to the overabundant grace and blessing that is on offer from God if we simply have faith and follow Christ.

The story today begins with a question: "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?"

And the response: "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little."

This response by Philip comes across as practical, reasoned, but where is the faith? This is not the first miracle that Jesus performs in the timeline of John's gospel. Jesus has turned water into wine, Jesus has been busy healing (even on the Sabbath!), so it isn't outside the realm to think Jesus might have a plan, but Philip misses the hint. Philip looks out over the people, allows the fear of the task that has been presented in Jesus' question to grip him, and he responds not out of reason but out of fear, for what will become of a hungry crowd?

But why is Philip gripped by fear? Simple, it's the human condition. We constantly allow fear to cripple us. We live lives filled with anxiety. We fear changes. We fear being made uncomfortable. We fear things that are new. We constantly, neurotically fear having enough. We fear things, because it is easy to do so. We fear things because it is what we are taught to do by our society.

Our public discourse is steeped in fear, primarily because of the hold that fear can have on all of us. In particular, the fear of (not) having enough is powerful enough to sway entire civilizations into their collapse. Listen to the public discourse that exists in our society today. "They should have to work for their government hand-out." "They're taking *your* guns away." "They're stealing *our* jobs." These are not statements of fact. These are arguments of fear. And they're effective, because we allow the fear of (not) having enough to consume us, to create in us a need for more and more and more, regardless of how detrimental that is to others in our society, particularly those on the margins.

Faith, then, comes to us as the antithesis of fear. In fact, the opposite of faith is not doubt but rather fear. For if we live in fear we can not be living in faith. And that's why the stories of Jesus feeding the multitudes are so important. Because they clearly illustrate that not only will God provide for us, but that God will provide for us with not only more than enough, God will provide for us with an overabundance of what we need. From 5 loaves and 2 fish, the crowd is able to take enough to have their hunger satisfied. I want to emphasize this, they have their hunger *satisfied*. It's not that everyone there took a little bit so they wouldn't starve. They all were able to take enough to be fully satisfied. And then, even after 5000 had been fully satisfied, there was still 12 baskets of leftovers. 12 whole

baskets of extra abundance that God has provided to the people. This is the promise of faith in God. Not that God will provide for us, but that God will provide for us in an overabundance. That regardless of our fear, of our practical reasoning, of our lack of understanding the heavy hints that Jesus is leaving for us, God will always provide in an overabundance.

And this is ultimately the thesis statement of this miracle: faith in the overabundance of the grace and gifts of God will always triumph over fear. This thesis, this teaching, is crucial for me to hear today and I think is crucial for the people of St. John's Cathedral to hear today.

My next Sunday in a parish will be in my new community, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Longview, WA. There is a lot of unknown in moving to a community you've only just recently learned even exists, let alone moving into that community to lead them in the journey of following Christ, but I am excited to do so, because while I could allow fear of the unknown to grip me and keep me timid, I embrace the new opportunity being presented, I am grateful for the call I have received by God to serve these people, and I have faith that the overabundance that God provides will be present in Longview too.

In 3 weeks, St. John's Cathedral welcomes its next Dean. What an exciting and life-giving moment! Sure there are a lot of changes happening here all at once this summer, but what an amazing opportunity to welcome in a passionate new leader and to come together as a community to work on building the kingdom of God here in Spokane and the Inland Northwest. You the people of St. John's too must embrace the reality that God provides an overabundance of blessing upon God's people, if we simply accept it. Sure, you

can be fearful about changes, you can be fearful about the unknown, or you can welcome the movement of the Spirit into this place to shape and transform this body of believers into something new and creative and exciting.

We may be parting but in so doing, we welcome the Spirit into our respective new journeys to show that overabundance of God's grace, God's love, God's passion, that we can harness in order to feed multitudes and have plenty leftover to start feeding again. If we embrace the reality of faith in the face of our fears, we embrace our call as followers of Christ to face this world with the knowledge that God stands with us in the presence of the Holy Spirit, and provides to us all that we need to face this world, if we are simply willing to accept it.

And, we will falter. It is our nature. We will give into fear. We will hear today's sermon, be fully committed to embrace the overabundance of God, and tomorrow we will allow a foothold for fear to fight back and make us question again. I mean, look at the end of today's gospel. Jesus has just fed 5000 with an overabundance of food. It is clear that God, through Jesus, is going to provide for these people and for the disciples who are following Christ. And yet, in their boat, in rough seas, they are terrified as Jesus walks out to them.

Why? Or maybe the better question is, how?

How could the disciples be terrified on the same day that the overabundance of God's grace and blessing has been made clear to them?

How can they be terrified on the same day that faith has been shown to triumph over fear?

It's easy really. They are human after all. And even when you have the privilege of witnessing a miracle (or two or three or...) firsthand, that doesn't stop you from being able to give into fear and allow it to dominate and control you. This is where we have to remind ourselves to live into our faith, faith that triumphs over fear, faith that promises and then delivers an overabundance of God's gifts to us, in God's grace and love and presence with us.

There is a lot of meat to today's gospel. And I think that one of the most important takeaways for this community here present, for me personally, is to live into the promise that is made evident in this miracle of feeding. However that overabundance actually came to be, it still came to be, because God was present amongst these people, the Spirit moved through them, and all were not only able to be satisfied but there was an overabundance of what was needed. Live into this example of faith. Deny the grip that fear can take hold of us with and live into the faith that God is a God of overabundance if we simply trust that God will provide.

Amen.