

One day a pastor's wife and I were talking about potluck meals at the church
We had both been to church meals where there wasn't enough food for everyone to enjoy
We had both hung back—waiting for others to go through the line first
We had also both only taken a small amount, leaving it to others to have more
Her response was to double what she prepared the next time—to make up the difference herself
I said I couldn't do that, not and prepare a message for worship—so I prayed loaves and fish prayers
She persisted in talking about how she had even tripled the amount of food she brought
And how frustrating it was that other people didn't notice and just ate bountifully
I said I prayed the loaves and fish prayers and it seemed that we always had enough
There were a few rounds of that conversation, in which the pattern continued
She ultimately looked at me and said, "maybe I should have prayed"
It seemed like it was more effective than working hard to make up the difference

It is this story in John 6:1-15 that I refer to when I talk about "loaves and fish prayers"

Too often we focus on our lack—what we don't have—our need—the shortage—even our desperation
Whereas, it seems that Jesus takes what we do have and begins there
It is as if we come to Jesus with what we have in our hands and it's up to Jesus...
It's up to Jesus to take that which we bring and give to him and make something of it
A culture of scarcity teaches us that we have to hoard and protect what we have
Trouble is there is no end to the protection as we never feel confident that we have enough

We're also very practical—what I need would be so impossible that there is no point in asking
Like Philip—"Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little"
The facts are the facts and that's that!
But Jesus isn't limited by our sense of impossibilities
Way forward may not look anything like we anticipate
Besides, it is Jesus who will make something of who and what we are

So, what can we learn from this story?

First we learn that God is plenty
For years I've said, in God, we are enough
We have everything we need to be the people God is calling us to be
But as I sat with this miracle, God has expanded my thinking
God is more than "just enough" because God is plenty
In God we are plenty—We are actually living that truth!
This building is "enough" but God is gracing us with an amazing "plenty"

Jesus cares about hospitality and that people are fed—he had compassion on the crowd
He didn't have to do that
I doubt anyone expected to get food that day and they would have taken care of themselves
We can live into our God-given purposes out of a sense of plenty and hospitality,
a welcoming and generous spirit—rather than be defined by practical limits like Philip
We have an opportunity to set the table in such a way that people know the truth about Jesus
Also, this kind of hospitality and generosity sparks generosity in others
It's my guess that those who brought a lunch also shared theirs
We begin to believe that there will be enough and I don't have to hoard what I have

We start with what we have—even if it is ridiculously inadequate by our standards
Imagine if Andrew had said, “I’ve scouted the crowd and a couple hundred brought lunch
They are all pretty small, but I think most would share”—that would make more sense!
But Andrew brought what he had—even if it wasn’t enough
We tell the truth about what we have and start there—
We give what we have—even if it is ridiculously inadequate by our standards

Jesus blessed a child’s small lunch and in blessing this small amount of food, it was changed
Our temptation to curse inadequate resources shrinks them further
Blessings change and empower both resources and people to their full potential
We want to be about blessing people and our resources. This will change us

The miracle of multiplication happens in passing out the baskets of food
As long as there was need, there was food
Miracles happen as we are faithful to live into the next steps, doing what God puts in front of us
As we are faithful in doing ministry, God’s miracle of multiplication and life happens
We often don’t even recognize the miracle until the remaining baskets are collected afterwards

But God’s provision and care is given in a multitude of unique ways
Twice Jesus fed the crowds with a small lunch
God fed the Israelites with manna when they were in the wilderness
Elijah was fed by ravens during a drought
The widow’s oil and flour didn’t run out until the drought was over
The widow took her last jar of oil and poured it into another jar and another until no more jars
In my experience, expecting God to provide food in a similar manner often disappoints
Not because God can’t do that—but because God meets each need uniquely
We trust and follow the Leadings, waiting to see how God will meet us this time

Also, it was easy for me to see that I couldn’t make up the difference when the church meal is short
But there are other areas, where I’m tempted to just do it myself and take over for God
Areas where I don’t ask for help or even ask God if there is another way
I can, therefore, I do...
It is a journey for all of us and we continually learn not to take on more than is ours to do
To not give in to the “it’s all up to me” thinking, whether financially or otherwise
To learn that there is absolutely nothing that we can’t take to God
In everything, we come before God as we are and bring what we have
We then trust God to do something with that and we wait for Leading
God will be faithful as we are faithful