

One year when I was a counselor at Sequanota we had a chaplain who had her commercial driver's license who offered to take a group of campers on a magical mystery tour in the camp bus. As we would approach an intersection, I would ask the campers which way they thought we should go, and then I would flip a coin, and if it came up heads, we'd go where they wanted, but if it came up tails we'd go the other way. Some of them were quite bothered when the coin came up tails. But the driver lived locally, I had been at camp long enough to learn the back roads; and we knew our destination. After we had spent enough time driving around for fun, there may have been a few not-quite-regulation coin tosses that just happened to get us a little closer to where we wanted to be, and none of the campers were disappointed when the bus finally stopped for ice cream at the place famous for their dessert called, I kid you not, the Pig Trough. I kept thinking about that as I read this week's gospel, where Jesus asks Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people?" even though he himself knew what he was going to do.

We have four gospels but only three years to the lectionary cycle, so Mark, whose gospel is the shortest, shares with John, whose gospel is the weirdest. Once every three summers we get five weeks of John's gospel talking about Jesus as the Bread of Life, starting with this story of Jesus feeding the multitude with just five loaves and two fish. This is the only miracle that occurs in all four of the gospels, each with a few unique details. In John's gospel, this story, like all of Jesus' supernatural acts, is called not a "miracle" but a "sign." As John tells it, Jesus doesn't perform miraculous works just to prove he can do them, though he can, or just because the people need what he provides for them, though they do; Jesus' works are always signs that point toward God, showing God's mercy and grace, showing that God is full of abundant life. It's why Jesus turns water into gallons and gallons of wine, why the people eat as much as they want with leftovers, why Lazarus is in the grave for three days—really, really dead—before Jesus calls him back to life. Jesus show us over and over that our God is a god of abundance.

Jesus keeps teaching us about God's abundance with so many signs because that abundance is sometimes hard for us to recognize and is too often not part of our experience in this world. We are *supposed* to enjoy the abundance of God; the psalmist narrates beautifully the way things are *supposed* to work:

*The eyes of all wait upon you O Lord, and you give them their food in due season.*

*You open wide your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.*

But it's clear that God's intentions for our good and abundant life do not always come to fruition. After this one meal that Jesus provides for the crowd, the people are ready to take him by force and make him king. Think how little their leaders cared for them and how poorly their leaders provided for them if all it took was some bread and tilapia to nearly cause a coup. It's not, of course, for lack of resources that the people were hungry; it was only that those who were in positions of power and privilege enjoyed excess for themselves while neglecting the needs of those whom they were meant to serve. The kings exploited the workforce to build palaces and summer homes so massive that they still exist; the priests, scribes, and Pharisees were always drawing Jesus' criticism for prioritizing their personal piety above their responsibility to care for the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner as God's law charged them to do. The gospel paints this world as home to competition, greed, and hoarding—a mindset of scarcity; God's kingdom corrects those values to cooperation, generosity, and sharing—an assumption of abundance. Whereas the psalmist watches God open wide his hand to satisfy every living thing, we are taught to close our hands around what we have to keep it for ourselves—which somehow makes us feel that we'll never have enough to be satisfied.

The confession and the invitation to communion that we've been using in this season both say, *there is always more than enough*. Jesus gets Philip to say out loud what they were all probably thinking—what we often think—that the need is too big, that there's no way there can be enough. Then Jesus confounds expectations by giving the people more than enough—12 baskets more, in fact. In the other gospels Jesus instructs his disciples to do the feeding, but here in John's gospel, Jesus does it himself. Because this story is about more than just bread; this is Jesus giving himself to us—his love, his grace, his mercy, his forgiveness, his Spirit that empowers us to do and to be not just enough—and how often do we worry if we're even enough—but more than enough.

It is hard to trust God's abundant love while this world threatens us with the fear that there isn't enough. When we hear echos of Jesus' question—*what are we going to do with this huge problem we're facing?* even if we remember the steadfast lovingkindness that God has shown us in the past, we still might wonder if this is finally the time when there really won't be enough, when God's faithfulness to us will run out. But if God is asking us to live into some kind of generosity—to be generous with our love, our mercy, our energy, our resources—it's because God already knows what he's going to do to help us. Heads or tails, we can trust the One who knows where we're going and who gives us everything we need for the journey: God's own self. God—I AM—has come to us. How can we be afraid?