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"The Leftovers"

2 Kings 4:42-44 John 6:1-21 Ephesians 3:14-21

INTRODUCTION TO 2 KINGS 4:38-44

Elisha the prophet was the successor to Elijah the prophet. When Elijah was preparing to be taken to heaven in the original Chariots of Fire Elisha asked that he be given a double portion of the Spirit that had been on Elijah. This morning's passage is one of a list of miracles that took place through the ministry of Elisha--multiplying oil so a widow could pay her debts, bringing a child back to life, making a poisonous pot of stew fit to eat. Hear how this miracle of Elisha's foreshadows one that Jesus takes even farther.

INTRODUCTION TO JOHN 6:1-21

With the exception of the Resurrection, this is the only miracle that made it into all four gospels. It was Jesus' greatest hit. He was at the height of his popularity. Jesus' popularity--and also his vulnerability--was cresting. Hear the word of the Lord from the gospel of John 6:1-21

Let's pray. Dear Lord, Give us the peace of knowing that with You all things are possible. Lord, thank you for this, your word. Open our eyes to see, our minds to understand, our hearts to receive and may we respond with all of our being to this your word through the power of your Holy Spirit. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

King Duncan shares a story and a man named Ken Erickson. One Saturday Ken's wife cleaned out leftovers from the refrigerator. She gave the one remaining portion of tortellini to their 6-year-old son, Jeremy. Their 8-year-old son, Matthew, also wanted some, so bickering ensued. After several unsuccessful attempts to mediate the dispute, Ken decided on a theological approach. Hoping to convince Jeremy to share his portion with Matthew, he said, "Jeremy, what would Jesus do in this situation?"

Jeremy immediately responded, "Oh, Dad, He would just make more!"

Obviously Jeremy had heard the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 and there being 12 baskets full of ... leftovers.

The biggest problem facing the church today is not lack of resources. We think it is, but it's not. The first question someone will ask when a necessary expense is brought up is "Where's the money coming from?" But that's the wrong question. The only question we should ask is: Is this God's will for our church? We may not realize it, but we are rich in terms of both financial strength and talent. We only scratch the surface in our giving of either.

We could feed the world's hungry. We could give comfort to the lonely, freedom to the captive, hope to the desperate. We have the resources.

It's like the preacher who told his congregation, "I've got some good news and some bad news. The good news is we have the money we need for this project. The bad news is that it's still in your bank accounts.

In today's lesson from the Gospel, Jesus is on a mountainside with his disciples. He looks up and sees a great crowd of five thousand men and an untold number of women and children. What if we surprisingly had 10,000 show up for our Birthday Lunch today? I did advertise it in the Baytown Sun. We would be scurrying around, probably in a panic. Jesus didn't panic.

Jesus looked at the masses and asked Philip for the facts. I guess Philip was the chairman of the Commitment and Finance Committee. Philip started figuring— Let's see.... 5,000 men, roughly 3,000 women and 4,000 kids meals....comes to about 12,000....Philip answered "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Another of his disciples, Andrew spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

I remember not too long ago when I was sitting in a Property Committee meeting. We were discussing the need to restripe our parking lot. It was not in our budget. The estimated cost was \$2,000. Before the meeting was over the money that was not in the budget was on the table....and we have a parking lot that looks like we care.

We often needlessly confine ourselves. We may yearn to use our lives creatively, but our invisible prisons remind us: "You can't do that. It isn't practical. You're not smart enough. It will cost too much. People will laugh at you. You're too young. You're too old. Your health won't allow it. It will take too long.

But suppose we could remember that we were made to achieve? What if we remember that miracles do happen? Suppose we really believed that we are children and heirs of this magnificent universe? Would we then still allow our limitations to dictate what we try? Suppose we became aware that resentments, hurts, hates, grudges, illness, greed are what's fostering the illusion of our own self-imposed limitations? **2**

Our self-imposed limitations sometimes cause us to forget that we can do so much more than we even attempt. This morning's epistle lesson that we have chosen as our theme verse for our Capital Campaign says it. "God, by the power at work within us ... is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine." More than we can ask or imagine!

Jesus took what little Andrew brought and put a plan in motion. Jesus commands them to sit in groups of 50. Imagine 2,000 groups the size of the folks gathered in this room.

Unavoidably, we tend to read Jesus' life backwards, knowing how it turns out, but that day, at that time, no one but Jesus had a clue as to what was about to happen even though it was something that had happened before on a much smaller scale.

Elisha, the heir to Elijah's ministry during the time of King David once fed 100 men with twenty loaves of barley. In that story, a servant in a time of famine brings 20 loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in a sack as an offering to Elisha. Suddenly Elisha says, "Give it to the people and let them eat." But the servant said, "How can I set this before a hundred people?"

But Elisha says, "Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the Lord, 'They shall eat and have some left.'" They had leftovers.

The people of Israel were promised that the Messiah would come in the spirit of the Prophets of old. And so there Jesus stood on the hillside in the shadows of that history and feeds not 100 like Elisha, but 12,000, and not with 20 loaves but five loaves ... and two fish.

Three of the Gospels record that "They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish." Only John tells what happened next.

Knowing that they intended to come and make Jesus king by force, Jesus withdrew." Jesus knew that for him to be an earthly king of a temporal kingdom was not what God had in store for him. Jesus spent the night on a mountain alone in prayer. Jesus got some time off, at last.

When night came the disciples got into a boat to head for Capernaum. At about 3 in the morning a storm came up one strong enough that even the disciples, who were experienced fishermen, were scared. Then something happened that scared them even more. They saw Jesus coming to them walking on the water. Multiplying fish and bread was one thing but walking on water? Who was this man? Was nothing impossible with him? They took him in the boat and the boat immediately arrived at the shore. They were mystified.

A minister was making a home visit to one of the younger families in his parish. A five-year-old boy answered the front door and told the minister his mother would be there shortly. To make some conversation, the minister asked the little guy what he would like to be when he grows up. The boy immediately answered, "I'd like to be possible." "What do you mean by that?" the puzzled minister asked. "Well, you see," the boy replied, "just about every day my mom tells me I'm impossible!" 3

This weekend the box offices opened to yet another Mission Impossible movie. This is the 6th installment of the series. The first one came out in 1996, making this the 22nd year of Impossible Missions. After the 3rd installment they started

giving them subtitles like “Ghost Protocol: and “Rogue Nation.” This one is called Fallout. Judging from a clip of Tom Cruise skydiving with James Cordon of the Late, Late Show I saw this week I’m guessing Tom will “Fall Out” of a plane at some point.

What seems to be impossible in your life these days? Is there some task you are facing in your personal life? Or maybe as you look out on our weary world and society today, you are prompted to ask, "Who is going to accomplish all the things that seem so impossible in our world today?"

Richard Patt writes, “In such times Jesus Christ is asking you and me to join with him in being partners in the impossible. Let’s try and take hold of the encouraging truth that emerges, and it is this: Christ never asks us to do the impossible unless he himself provides the power and resources to get the job done. So today let us confidently answer his call, for he is our divine partner in doing the impossible. 4

Friday July 20 was the 49rd anniversary of Neil Armstrong’s first step on the moon. That was something that for years people thought was impossible. For those who still insist that it didn’t happen I saw a meme that said this, “Today we celebrate the 400,000 people who faked 11 moon landings and kept quiet for 49 years.” Now I think THAT’s impossible.

What are we to learn from these miracles? What were the facts? Philip saw this clearly. He said, “We don’t have the money to do this,” Andrew saw it clearly also. He asked, “This boy has a small meal but how far will that go among so many?” They pretty much all knew that when it comes to crossing the lake without a boat it’s pretty much swim or sink. But faith can override facts. Faith can multiply and Faith can mystify.

Philip, Andrew, and the rest of the disciples like all of us, were subject to the laws and facts that governed their world, but God is not. I do not mean to say that any time we want we can call upon God and he will override natural law. But what I suggest to you today is that where Jesus is present, no fact, no matter how incontrovertible, will keep God from accomplishing God’s plans. Where there is a will and it is God is there, there will be a way.

We were all captivated by the rescue of the young football team in Thailand. Here’s another story of a deliverance from Cambodia to Thailand.

A 19-year-old girl by the name of Khun Paot, escaped the Khmer Rouge rule in Cambodia after an arduous journey with 100 others through miles of jungle, canals, mountains, and rivers. Standing between them and freedom were communist soldiers, the elements, and a stretch of jungle ground covered with thorns. Most of the escapees were barefoot or wore flimsy thongs.

A midnight-like darkness hampered the struggling group as it crossed a valley between two high mountain ranges. "We could see absolutely nothing," Paot later told a missionary, Maxine Stewart. "We didn't even know where to step." Suddenly hundreds of fireflies swarmed into view. Their glow made enough light for the people to see the path. The refugees reached the next mountain by "firefly light," said Mrs. Stewart.

After Paot was transferred to Kham Put refugee camp, she was invited to a Christian meeting. "I know that old man," she exclaimed at a picture on the wall of the chapel. "He is the one who led us and showed us the way to Thailand and freedom." She was pointing to a picture of Jesus. 5

I don't know what storm of life will come your way this week, or what storm you may be enduring at this very moment. But I know this: even as the storm rages around you, if you will listen very carefully with your heart, you will hear a gentle voice calling to you, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid. I'm still here." And in time the storm will pass. But Jesus will still be there. 6

Whether you believe the miracle of Jesus multiplying the bread and fish, or if you believe Jesus' miracle was in moving selfish human hearts causing the multitudes to share, above all, remember this: The next time you see a need or feel inadequate, don't look at the hillside, look in the basket. (Hold up Basket) Don't count the difficulties presented. Look at the resources possessed. Don't measure your problems. Measure God's power! 7

The kinship of God's family that Jesus came to bring is about multiplying. Over and over Jesus illustrated through his parables that the kingdom starts small. It's like a mustard seed, or a little yeast in a lump of dough or a small pearl in a large field or on a large hillside with 2,000 groups of 50 fed from one small lunch.

The kinship of God's family is about mystifying. It's about making possible the impossible like skiing without skis or a boat. Like Mary said when she was told she was to give birth to the Messiah, "With God all things are possible.

Jesus is still multiplying and mystifying. It may not be with loaves and fishes, but hopes and wishes. It may not be walking on water but it may be talking with your daughter. Like Jeremy's answer to his dad's question regarding a kid's meal of leftover tortellini, "What would Jesus do?" Jesus would make more. And when Jesus makes more we have another challenge. What will we do with ... the Leftovers?

Let's pray

O God We give you thanks for how you care for our needs. You refresh us with the same waters that are poured on us at baptism, a reminder of your covenant, which brings new life. You cleanse us through the purging presence of your Holy Spirit as fresh breezes replace stale air. Not a day goes by without countless reminders of how you brood over what you gave birth to, nor can we go

anywhere and hope to escape the touch or your love. You fill us with awareness of your compassion.

We pray for the young, who begin new life in utter dependence, for the unborn and the new born, who drew their first nourishment from another. We are reminded of how needful we are. Give us hearts that reach out to children. Give us wisdom to impart direction to them. Give us patience to hear their frustrations with them. Give us humility to listen to what they have to say without judging them. Give us imagination so that we can enter in their hopes.

We pray for your children from whom we are alienated. If it is because of hostility or anger, give to us a spirit of reconciliation, sufficient to approach them and seek forgiveness. If it is because their skin color is different give us a sense of the length of Christ's table around which all will dine and rejoice. If it is because they taunt us or otherwise cause us pain, give us grace enough to show them the tenderness you give to us. Make us your agents of compassion, understanding and reconciliation.

Hear us as we pray for the people and the concerns on our hearts this morning.

We pray for a vision more of what we have than what we have not. We pray for a willingness to share what we have with those who have even less. We pray for a hope that knows that through you and your power You will be able to do far more than we can ask or imagine.

These things we pray in the name and for the sake of Jesus our Lord.

1. ChristianGlobe Illustrations, by King Duncan
2. Discovering the Laws of Life, by John Marks Templeton
3. Partners in the Impossible, by Richard Patt
4. Richard Patt
5. September 1979, p. 25., by The Recorder
6. ChristianGlobe Illustrations, by Johnny Dean
7. Sermons for Sundays after Pentecost, by Stephen M. Crotts