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Scripture: John 6: 1-15

Sermon Title: The Abundance of Jesus

John 6:1-15

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

Feeding the Five Thousand

6 After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias.[a] 2 A large crowd kept following him because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. 3 Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. 4 Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. 5 When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" 6 He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. 7 Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." 8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 9 "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" 10 Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place, so they[b] sat down, about five thousand in all. 11 Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. 12 When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." 13 So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. 14 When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."

15 When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself. (This is the Word of the Lord)

Prayer..

Introduction:

The story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 is a familiar one to us. It is an amazing miracle that demonstrates the abundance of Jesus.

For me this story has many different themes all related to abundance.

1. First, we see how God works through the young to bring abundance.
2. Second the abundance of Jesus includes meeting physical and spiritual needs.
3. Third, the abundance of Jesus is possible in partnership with our faith or trust in God's goodness and power.

Let's begin first by exploring how Jesus uses young people to bring abundance. Whenever I read this story about the feeding of the 5,000, I wonder what it would be like to be the boy that brought his lunch to Jesus. This kid had five barley loaves and two fish. Not much food and yet he gave what he had. I am glad that the disciple Andrew helped this boy bring his gift to Jesus. It reminds me that adults need to open pathways for youth to be involved in ministry. Unfortunately, too often we forget how younger people contribute to Christian community and mission in Christ's name. In preparation for today's message, I found an article entitled- Are there any children in the Bible, written by Brandon Ambrosino – He writes

“Sometimes, even when a child plays an important part of a Bible story, adults can still overlook them when talking about scripture in church or during Sunday school. For example, have you ever heard the story about Jesus taking a few loaves of bread and fish and feeding a giant crowd? Jesus is with hundreds of hungry people, and none of them have anything to eat. Except for one child—a kid whose name the narrator doesn't bother to tell us. This boy has five loaves of bread and two fish, and he gives them to Jesus because he wants to help. Jesus takes the small meal and then, as only he can do, he turns it into a giant feast.

We tell this story to remind ourselves that God takes care of our needs, and that is definitely true. But there's another important lesson in this story: Jesus didn't make bread and fish out of nothing—he made more bread and more fish out of this boy's gift. The boy was an important part of the miracle: We don't know what would have happened if he wasn't there. We only know that he was there and that he was able to help Jesus perform one of his greatest miracles. The next time you hear this story of Jesus magically feeding thousands of people, remember that there might not have been a miracle if a kid hadn't helped.”

I like Brandon's point. We are finishing up the summer season and I am always reminded during this time of year of my background working at summer camps with children, youth, and other young adults. What makes camp so meaningful is that it is a time when younger people are the focus of the mission of the Christian church? Summer camp reminds us to put kids first and to help them explore their faith. As a former camp staffer and counselor

and as a former Youth and Young Adults pastor, I think this story of Jesus Feeding the 5,000 might be best titled- How a youth group kid and Jesus partnered in mission?

This story reminds us that youth are at the heart of the mission of Christ in the world. When youth are engaged in mission in a church, the church is healthier and the youth are equipped also to make a major difference in the world. I am excited that Jen Henry, a dedicated teacher of youth for many years, is now our Student Ministries Director. Jen and I are dreaming about how we might effectively support our youth and partner with them in mission. In our story, the abundance of Jesus' love is shown in his partnership with a youth. We can follow the example of Jesus in making children, youth, and young adults a priority in our ministry here.

A second area of focus related to the theme of abundance is how this story of Jesus Feeding of the 5,000 reminds us that the ministry of Jesus and therefore the Gospel itself involves meeting both physical and spiritual needs. Jesus could have sent the people home after everyone became hungry. Jesus chose to care for the people and met their physical need of food. I imagine many of the people who were following Jesus were poor and benefitted from a full meal.

Some of you know that at various times in my ministry I have participated in urban ministry that focused on meeting physical needs of people. In college I visited with people almost every Saturday night with a ministry called En Christo or In Christ. As part of our ministry, we gave out sack lunches to friends and neighbors who were living in poverty in downtown Spokane. We built friendships and prayed for people, but the food was also a tangible way to show the love of Jesus. At various times, I have also volunteered at food banks and served meals to hungry people. The story of the feeding of the 5,000 encourages us all like the disciples in the story to partner in sharing food and other resources with the hungry. We are to empower people who are living in poverty to make steps that will lead to greater health and sustainable living. We are to support the availability of food, but also to work for provision of education, economic opportunities, and affordable housing, among many other social needs.

The Christian Church is at its best when we connect caring about social needs of people with sharing the message of Jesus' love for the whole world. Talking about the truth of Jesus as Friend, Savior, and Lord is important. Meeting spiritual needs of people through prayer, worship, and community is key, but the Gospel is not the full Gospel without helping to support the physical needs of people. Also, if any of us worry that Jesus was creating a bit of dependency here in this story, Jesus himself works in this story to make clear that his purposes are not just to provide free food. They love having Jesus meet their physical needs and even want him to become the king who will provide all that they want. Jesus wants

them to depend on him relationally, but he is a different kind of king who does not want have the people thrust him into political leadership. Instead, Jesus want to empower the people to humble themselves before God and follow Jesus and then later through the early Christian community, the Holy Spirit guides the Jesus followers to share their possessions and make sure that all the needs of the community are supported as each contributes to the whole. We call that the Beloved Community. Something Martin Luther King Jr. spoke about a lot.

I am excited that are church, Newberg First Presbyterian, seeks to support the whole Gospel of sharing the message of Jesus but also by tangible ways we support social issues and needs in our community and beyond. Most recently, with the help of Ciaran Hynes, Lory Albright, and the rest of our amazing Peace Garden Committee, we are harvesting food from our vegetable garden. Lory Albright just texted me a photo this week of the harvest of tomatoes and other vegetables that she was taking to the Bruin Pantry, which is a food bank connected to George Fox University.

Notice in our story the abundance of food that Jesus offers through this miracle. When we partner together to meet physical needs, no one needs to go hungry. No one needs to be houseless. No one needs to be left to face the perils of life alone. I hope we see in this story of Jesus offering food the call of all of us to participate in urban and global mission that supports physical and spiritual needs of people.

The last theme related to abundance in this story that I want to highlight today, has to do with faith. I love both Philip and Andrew in our story today. The disciple Philip is rational and I can tend to be a bit rational sometimes. Jesus asks Philip, where are we going to buy bread for all these people to eat? Philip is like it would cost a ton of money just to give people a little food. Philip is just being honest, but no doubt Philip is also perplexed. I think some of the disciples are hoping Jesus will send everyone home because the need feels to great. But good old Andrew and the young boy step up and offer some bread and fish. Andrew has a little faith that maybe Jesus will do something special with this food and look what happens. More than 5,000 people- possibly up to 10,000 people are fed thanks to the generosity of the boy and the courage of Andrew to have faith as well. Ultimately, Jesus does the miracle, but the disciples' partner with Jesus to make the ministry happen.

For me this story is a reminder to not lose faith in God's abundance. We as the church are partnering with Jesus to embody the love of God to the community of Newberg and beyond to other parts of the world through other mission, we do together. We are coming to the end of summer. September is around the corner and then in October we will be in stewardship season once again. Consider this part of my message an early reminder of our stewardship in ministry. We partner together in this church through our time, talent, and treasure to

support the mission of Christ. We offer our gifts of finance and service in partnership with Jesus, just like the disciples offered themselves to deliver the bread and fish and to pick up the leftovers. The important thing is to have an attitude like Andrew and the young boy who trusted enough in the abundance of Jesus to offer what they had to be used for mission. They trusted in abundance rather than fearing scarcity. Philip was afraid there was not enough money to provide for the food. Jesus went with Andrew and the boy and did a miracle of abundance.

Friends Jesus is our provider. As we partner with Christ with whatever level of faith we have, we can trust that God will abundantly provide for our needs and the missional needs we support in our town and broader world. The Peace Garden Vegetable garden is a visible example of God's abundance. Through the dedication of volunteers, both planting and harvesting, an abundance of food has been offered to people who are hungry in our community of Newberg.

May we continue to be people of faith who partner with Jesus in caring for the physical and spiritual needs of people. May we never be people of scarcity who lose hope in God's provision. Instead, may we be people of generosity who trust that Jesus will multiply our gifts to help so we might make a difference for the vulnerable in our community.

One other word of encouragement. Like I mentioned last Sunday, faith in God's abundance is a team sport. When one of us is lacking in faith we lean on another member of the congregation whose faith is a little stronger.

What I have noticed over the last many years at our church is that God has a way of sustaining this place and our mission together. Our job is to keep trusting in God and to be open for surprises. We are to be open to the surprise of God's abundance. Sometimes the abundance comes in a new guest to our community or in the resources for air conditioning. Sometimes the surprise is in a new volunteer who helps with taking care of our Peace Garden. Sometimes we are surprised by new staff members who enhance our ministry outreach. I am grateful for example for Keelie who is helping with our website, Jen is improving our Student Ministries. Maybe you noticed that we have two newer preachers who help us out from time to time, Jodi Hansen and Kristen Sandoz. Special thanks to them.

God continues to provide for our church just like Jesus provided food for his community so many years ago. Jesus is just as alive now as he was then and God continues to be our abundant God. Let us pray...