

The Table of Abundance
Luke 9:10-17
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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Do you remember that word we talked about last week from the Seder meal? Dayenu? It would have been enough.

Well, today we hear another “it would have been enough” story.

It begins with Jesus healing. It would have been enough if Jesus had simply healed the people. (In fact, the disciples were well aware that nothing more was expected.) It would have been enough to show them compassion. But then he chose to feed them.

Even once he decided to feed them, it would have been enough if he had given them a small snack, a bit of sustenance to get them through until they found more food, a little treat to let them know he cared. But he wanted them to have a meal.

It would have been enough if the food that was shared simply filled each person’s stomach. But there was food leftover...not just crumbs, but twelve baskets full.

The story of the Judeo-Christian tradition is filled with “it would have been enough” moments - because ours is a God who doesn’t *just* do enough, but ours is a God who is known to do more, to give more, to welcome more, to love more.

Ours is a God of abundance.

Of course that means we are invited, even compelled, to be people of abundance as well. And this calling isn’t about the type of abundance that the American dream seems to be made of - the type that gives us more stuff and bigger homes and larger storage units. Rather this is about an abundance of caring, of sharing...this is about creating a world of abundance for all people.

After all, remember that this story isn’t a story *just* about Jesus’ activity. No, just before this, Luke tells us that Jesus had given the disciples power to go and do the same work that he was doing. That first sentence in today’s reading, “*On their return the apostles told Jesus all they had done,*” (Luke 9:10, NRSV) that is about the work they did in his name, by his power.

And, when this large crowd of people was fed...it wasn’t just Jesus who did the feeding, but remember “*he said to them, ‘You give them something to eat’*” (Luke 9:13, NRSV). And even when they weren’t sure exactly what that would look like, Jesus continued to engage the disciples in this act of abundance.

In many ways, we talk about this every week when we come to the communion table. After we break the bread and remember that Jesus offered it to his friends saying, “This is my body...”, do you remember what we say? We say, “When we eat the bread, we offer *our* bodies to continue to do the work of Jesus in this world.”

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Friends, it is not just God who is about abundance. It was not just Jesus who was about abundance. It was not just the disciples who were partners in his ministry of abundance. But we, too, are called to be people who live from a place of abundance and help others do the same.

So, how we do that? How do we set tables of abundance in the world? Sometimes this idea, this challenge can feel...just that...challenging. But, there are examples all around us.

A pastor I know spoke of a trip that she took to another country, a country we would classify as poor. The travel group was going through a jungle landscape from one village to another in an old bus on rough roads when their bus was stopped by a downed tree. As you can imagine they became nervous. There was no cell phone service, no emergency personnel, no professional tree trimmers to come to the rescue.

But it didn't take long for someone to show up. It turned out they weren't too far from their destination and folks from that village soon started showing up, coming out of the trees as if they had been waiting there all along. However, not knowing exactly where they were or who these people were, many in the group weren't first sure whether the people they saw were friendly or if they were going to have a difficult time. They were especially uncertain when they saw the machetes and other tools they carried.

But it soon became clear. The machetes were used to clear a space and before they knew it a makeshift table made of an abandoned door was set up as villagers brought food in abundance to set upon it. While the bus driver and others worked out how to manage the blocked road, the travelers were fed a feast. A feast from people who we would say have very little...but people who knew they had enough, and more to share.

I have known more than one person who, upon planning to go on a mission trip to a place that we would define based on its scarcity, had the expectation that a side benefit of the trip would be losing a few pounds. However, time and time again, the opposite has happened. Even in the midst of poverty, guests have been fed from the abundance of the local people, and many of them have come home with unexpected extra pounds.

But we don't have to look halfway around the world to see tables of abundance being set.

Just recently here in Iowa City a person found themselves unemployed and began to worry about food. Bread was something he had run out of and without a paycheck he wasn't sure where to turn. It was suggested that he go to CommUnity's food bank. That day, it turned out, they had received not only bread, but bread in abundance. "Take all you want," they told him. There was more than enough.

Two Sundays ago we gathered for Welcome Sunday. Everyone ate and there was food leftover. Food to take home to a friend who could use it or a family member who wasn't able to attend. Food that was shared through the Coralville Food Pantry that week in order to feed our neighbors. In fact, I can't remember a church meal - whether a pot luck or catered meal - where it hasn't been true that there is always enough for everyone.

Enough and more.

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And yet, if we are honest, we likely feel more connection to the disciples in this story than to Jesus. While we admire Jesus, we tend to be more risk averse like the disciples. See, I don't think their hesitation was just because they didn't want to get their hands dirty...I don't think that it was just that they were tired and wanted a break from the crowds. I suspect they looked around and simply didn't know how they could accomplish such a task. I suspect they worried about what would happen if some got fed but there wasn't enough for everyone. I suspect, even after time with Jesus, even after their own accomplishments in ministry, they still found themselves rooted in scarcity, afraid to take the risk to trust in the possibility of abundance.

We talk a lot about the extravagant love of God. We talk a lot about their being room at the table for everyone. We talk a lot about how there is always enough.

And yet, sometimes it is hard to live as if these are really true. Sometimes it is difficult to carry those ideas out into our daily lives. It is easier to leave them here, to spiritualize them, to make them about God.

But, I wonder...what would our lives look like if we took the proclamation that there is always enough and lived it out in our daily lives?

What would the world look like if the extravagance of God's love and generosity weren't only celebrated in worship, but were made real in the ways that we live, in the ways that we interact with others?

We are invited each week to a table of abundance. But the abundance isn't meant to stay here. Rather we are called to carry that abundance out the doors and into the world...we are called to set tables in our homes, in the streets, in our workplaces, in our schools, in every place that we find ourselves...tables of abundance where there is always enough and even more. May it be so.