

ALL WE NEED: THE MIRACLE OF ABUNDANCE

Mark 6: 30-44

Augsburg University Chapel
August 30, 2024

It is so good to be together again here, in Hoversten Chapel – the heart of our university where we gather each day to hear the Word that is the foundation for our learning and living. How I miss this sacred time during the summer months and how I rejoice in this return to the rhythm of our lives together.

Eighteen years ago, in my first fall as Augsburg's 10th president, I invited the community into reflection on four remarkable values – abundance, generosity, engagement, and service – values that I had come to see as not just concepts we talk about, not just tasks we take on, but a way of life together. And it has been among the greatest joys of my 18+ years in this community to see us live our lives together grounded in these values, But as I suggested then, this life together takes a miracle to make it work!

And that miracle is found, I believe, in the familiar story in our scripture for this morning: "The feeding of the 5000"

Allow me to lift out of this familiar story a few ideas that may not be apparent to those of us who have heard it again and again (Palmer on "reading scripture out of doors"):

- First, see how Jesus understands the need for rest and time alone – soul weariness, along with physical and emotional fatigue, that leads us to flail for control
- And then the crowd presses on Jesus and disciples again – the scripture says 5,000, but what about the women and children – shall we say 10 or 15,000? – and Jesus begins to teach them, but the time grows late
- And the disciples begin to respond – just like us! – with their soul-weary solutions to the problem
- First, send these people home – self-help
- And then, throw money at the problem
- But here comes Jesus' response: collect the bread and fish, break into companies of 50 and 100, redistribute, feed the hungry
- And there is the miracle – in the smaller groups, the crowd begins to trust, and the personal attention and relationships mean that people are willing to share what they heretofore were hiding for themselves

Jesus says: we have all we need here if we find ways to unleash the hidden gifts and talents and foodstuffs that will meet the needs of the people. This is the promise of abundance in a world of scarcity – this is the promise into which we are called as God's people in this place – this is the promise of grace and hope and peace that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord. This is the miracle of abundance.

Think about what this promise means to our lives of faith and discipleship as we come together as God's people in this place:

- The abundance of our lives – Together, we must face our own fears, our own anxieties that come when we look at the world as a scarce existence. The abundance of God’s people – what are you hiding because it is hard to trust and believe? What must we do to accept God’s gifts, God’s promise, God’s abundant and awesome love? I think about Professor Tim Pippert and his vision for the Augsburg Family Scholars, serving students who come out of the foster system. Tim imagined what we could do as a community to support these amazing students, he asked for help, he built trust and collaboration across our community, and now we have a program that not only serves dozens of students who might not otherwise have gone to college, but also is a national model for serving foster students. What a miracle!
- The abundance of this place – I am so very struck with the remarkable stories of Augsburg as an institution and community in this neighborhood, city and world. By our firm resolve to settle in this neighborhood, by sending our students out into the world as educated and faithful citizens, by our vigilance and stewardship of our environment, by our willingness to embrace hospitality and generosity for our fellow humans – in each of these ways we are practicing abundance here and now. Today, I want to lift up a special story of abundance. Several years ago, a student named Emily Knudsen was in my senior honors seminar, and as a final project (she didn’t want to write another paper!) she proposed planting three apple trees. Her vision was that these trees on campus would bear fruit that could help nourish future students and neighbors. Walk outside the chapel today and see those trees full of apples for the taking – they are really quite tasty! All we need – abundance – what a miracle!
- The abundance of the promise – The challenge I have for us is to truly live as a community that believes we have all we need, a community of abundance in a world of scarcity. Here may we dedicate ourselves to trust-building, to collaboration, to doing things differently, to working together to meet the needs of students and neighbors, to the courage and imagination to practice abundance. Where others say there is not enough, we say we have all we need, more than plenty, if we believe and bring our full selves to our efforts to educate, to feed the hungry, clothe the poor, meet the needs of strangers.... Right here in Cedar-Riverside, in Minneapolis, in a community and society that can’t get beyond the world’s scarcity questions – a community that needs a miracle – and here we are!

And so today, we are offered a miracle – the miracle of God’s abundance – that calls us to a life as part of this faithful community. Are we willing to let this miracle happen here? Are we ready to accept God’s promise for ourselves, this university and our community? God calls us. And our answer must be: Here I am, Lord – I return to you what has been so graciously given to me – and thereby I live with the sure and confident faith in life abundant. We have all we need! What a miracle. Thanks be to God. Amen.