

“...you have all you need.”

It might be our favourite Jesus story – feeding the multitude. It’s one of my favourites because it helps me make the argument that Jesus established Presbyterianism – you know, the practice of ‘no event without a feast...’ Of course, there are plenty of other stories about Jesus that involve the production, consumption, enjoyment and shared experience of food. But here (in Mark 6 and John 6, if you’re inclined to compare them) we encounter a miracle of a very specific kind.

Jesus’ disciples are newly returned from their ‘two-by-two-missionary adventures,’ and they are keen to tell Jesus what they’ve learned. “Let’s go find a quiet place”, says the teacher “and we can rest while you tell me.” And away they go.

Not unnoticed though. And the crowds, eager to see and know more about this little band of miracle makers, embark with a purpose, and they sit waiting at this deserted place for Jesus and company to arrive. (Mk 6:33)

There’s no record the disciple’s reaction to having their mini-vacation spoiled by another demanding crowd. Mark simply reports that **Jesus** saw the crowd, ‘and had compassion for them...’ and began to teach them many things.

Maybe it’s a rest for the disciples – maybe not – but by the end of the day, their frustration leads to the suggestion that the crowd be dismissed. ‘It’s late (and we’re hungry) and we’re a long way from town. Clear out the crowd and let them fend for themselves.’ Jesus, ever compassionate, says no.

“You give them something to eat.”

“...you have all you need.”

Now we notice that the frustration turns to selfish excuse making. ‘We can’t afford to feed them...there are too many...it’s a long way to the market...’

The miracle of the loaves and fishes is a topic of constant debate between my friend Rob and me. For Rob, the miracle is that the food magically multiplies; such is the power of God in Jesus. And I say ‘ok, but what if...’

What if the divine, get-out-of-jail-free card isn’t always the right answer? What if miracles sometimes involve cooperation or compromise? What if miracles are sitting there, fully formed, waiting for the right question to be asked – for the right person to come along?

What if you already have all you need?

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What are you looking for when you pray for a miracle? Healing? Satisfaction? World peace? Inner peace? A better job for your daughter? A better marriage for your son? All of the above??? Miracle means the broken gets fixed, and we don’t know how. Miracle means the cheque doesn’t bounce and the bills get paid. Miracle means the right team wins – the legislation is passed – someone’s mind is changed... or more than 5000 people are satisfied by a small but significant lunch.

What are you looking for?

Where will your miracle come from?

“...you have all you need.”

Well, what if you already have all that you need to make the miracle happen?

That's what Mark 6 suggests miracles are made of; pre-existent supplies fill all the needs (real or imagined.) lunch is over and no one is left out – no one goes hungry. Sure, it's a metaphor too (or maybe it was always a metaphor) – a way for Jesus (by way of Gospel tradition) to tell us we are enough – we have enough – and our resources, when shared, can do enough...or more than enough.

This is a miracle of abundance in the midst of a people who are painfully aware of shortages of all kinds. We who seek abundance at any expense – to our own impoverishment – are urged by this story to view abundance much differently.

Crowded around Jesus – so eager to be in his presence that they invade his privacy and race to get to the 'front of the line' in this secluded place – crowded around Jesus, they discover abundance where they imagined there could be nothing of consequence.

You already have all you need.

Even here. Even now. In a country boasting an embarrassment of riches that are poorly and unjustly distributed, there are too many who have nothing – and too many more who say they don't have enough. We have – in the midst of abundance – created a myth of scarcity, and urged people to want more than they need – and to strive for more than their neighbour. We have adopted a 'survival of the fittest' model, with the fittest being those most able to look after themselves.

Jesus weeps.

“...you have all you need.”

Even here – even now, Jesus sits waiting for us to ask him to solve the problem – to demand our miracle – so that he can say, once again, ‘you give them something...’ Do the job. Make justice roll. Cooperate. Compromise. Find a way to bring the just and peaceable kingdom to life. You have all you need.

The necessary ingredients for a miracle are within us, around us and among us. Our ability to see abundance is veiled by a culture that has taught us to gather things together – to cultivate personal abundance (and sigh ‘too bad about the rest.’ Our miracle working muscles are underdeveloped because we find it safer to concentrate on our present needs, and forget about the bigger picture.

Short-sightedness is our natural defence. Selfish is a protective, evolutionary measure. But God’s abundance is painted vividly throughout Scripture and broadly across the vast canvas of Creation. Jesus spends all his energy inviting us to broaden our horizons; pointing to the hidden reality of abundance and saying “you give them something...”

The miracle is ours to make. Such miracles as this wait on our awareness of the difference between ‘want’ and ‘need.’ These miracles of ‘and everyone was satisfied’ go so far beyond our usual expectation of heal ME, help ME, bless ME that they do indeed qualify as miracles. For when injustice is addressed and abundance is shared, the light of God shines brighter, and the kingdom of perfect peace moves a little closer.