

**Brothers and Sisters, Grace to you and peace, from God our Father
and from our Lord and Saviors Jesus Christ... Amen**

This church year we are focusing on the gospel of Mark. But because Mark is a shorter narrative, we will also have a lot of readings from the gospel of John. In fact, for the next five weeks all of our gospel readings will be from John.

Today, our readings start a theme-- Jesus and the bread of life. This week we have Jesus feeding the five thousand. This is a story about abundance and sustenance, and perhaps a window into the economy of God's kingdom.

Our gospel story begins with Jesus intentionally setting up the events that are about to unfold. Jesus asks Phillip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" Phillip answers, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little."

And then suddenly a little boy appears offering everything he has. Andrew says "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish." And then we hear Andrew in the next breath lament, "But what are they among so many people?"

In two sentences Andrew expresses hope in the gift of the little boy, and then he immediately reverts back to the crisis of the moment-- the lack of food. I think as human beings this is where we live all the time, constantly struggling between having enough, and not having enough; perhaps the struggle between the experience of abundance and the fear of scarcity.

I wonder if it would be helpful for us this morning to make a distinction between two very different economies-- the human economy, and the divine economy. Human economies are organized around the principle of scarcity. In the Kingdom of God, the economy is organized around the principle of abundance-- Completely opposite premises...

Let's talk about human economies first...

We have goods and services, and the prices for those goods and services are based on the law of supply and demand. This is fundamentally a system based on fear. We worry there won't be enough, we're afraid we won't get what we need or want, there is only a limited supply of anything, we hoard, we build walls to protect what is "ours."

By and large, it's a system that focuses on us over-against others. The economy of humanity turns us inward on ourselves. When we're so busy looking out for ourselves, we lose sight of the neighbor.

Also, in the way of human economies, we get caught up in worshiping the god of materialism, the stuff itself... more is better, bigger is nicer, newer is improved, we get caught up in that covetousness game... And of course, we all know that the guy who dies with the most toys wins.

Doesn't this pretty much sum up the economy in the Kingdom of humanity? Lots of wants and needs and fears... And truth is, as rough as our human economy can be, it is still the best way for us humans to order our communities. We're human beings, we're saints and sinners, we're interdependent and we live together.

For us to live together in community, we need an economy. And ours may not be perfect, but it's the best we've got and we keep working at it!

Now let's talk a little about the economy in the Kingdom of God... When Jesus talks about faith, he often talks about the faith of children.

Jesus asks, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" And suddenly that little boy appears in our story. And against all the common sense we've been raised to believe, the boy freely gives away what he has. Without any concern for himself, he just gives his food away. If that was my son, I'd probably say, "What are you thinking we need that food for later!"

Quick story - I remember when my daughter, Johanna began her first job when she was about 16. She was nervous and scared. We gave her a lot of encouragement, and she did well. She worked hard and became more confident. She loved the people she worked with, and she loved helping people.

I remember when Jo got her first paycheck. She hardly knew what to do with it. She was so proud of it. We set up a savings account for her and taught her how to make deposits. We started having conversations about saving and building up for the future, how to budget and how to be a responsible adult. Money is values, and we wanted to teach her how to make good financial decisions.

Around Christmas time that year we started noticing that Jo was withdrawing a lot of money. She had saved it up so she could buy some special gifts for her friends. For her, money was for sharing. Nothing gave her more joy than to give a present to a friend.

Almost immediately after she started working, she also became very diligent about using her offering envelopes here at church. We didn't know it at the time, but she was very generous. Kris and I had a dilemma, should we actually discourage her from giving money to the church? We told her that tithing meant only ten percent!

Jo was like that little boy, offering the barley loaves and fishes. For her it was all about sharing what she had. She loved her friends, She loved the church, it was just simply a matter of the heart. It was simply her sheer joy to participate.

I don't mean to put Jo on a pedestal, she's a saint and sinner just like all the rest of us; she's just unfortunate to be my kid...

And I think it's exactly right here, in the innocence of childlike generosity, where we glimpse the economy in the Kingdom of God. You see, when fear is replaced with love, all the rules we know so well about human economics suddenly get thrown out the window.

It's just what happens. Hoarding and protecting turns to giving and sharing. When we are not in fear or competition with one another our hearts open to one another and we become generous; not only with our love, but with our money and possessions. And of course, this doesn't happen in an all or nothing fashion, but rather by degree. Love leads and generosity happens.

Jesus instructs the crowd to sit, he breaks the bread and gives thanks, and they begin to distribute the food. And suddenly I think two miracles happen; the food begins to multiply. And I wonder if perhaps the greatest miracle was that the hearts of those five thousand began to open to one another and they began sharing what they themselves had brought.

Perhaps the people are inspired by the child and follow suit, offering and taking as all had need. In the economy in the Kingdom of God, fear and scarcity is replaced with love and abundance.

Quick story-- I like to garden. And I'm not the greatest gardener in the world, but I'm always amazed at what happens when you put seeds in the ground. One thing that I plant every year is zucchini. And if you are a gardener, and have ever planted zucchini you already know what I'm about to say, don't you!

Zucchini is prolific! A small family only needs one zucchini plant. Well, every year, year after year, I tell myself, next year, only plant two seeds. Well, every spring, I get worried and scared and so I convince myself there isn't going to be enough zucchini, so I always plant about five times more than what I'll ever need. And every year I have so much zucchini I don't know what to do with it all. Does anyone need any zucchini?

In the spring I worry I won't ever have enough, and in the fall, I worry about giving God's abundance away. I think the economy in the Kingdom of God is like that.

The good news this morning is that God loves us, he doesn't love us a little bit; He loves us abundantly! He sends the rain on the righteous and unrighteous alike, and in our fear and constant worry, God is there, loving us extravagantly, and he gives us this day our daily bread. God doesn't love us if we're good; God loves us because God is good.

I'm always inspired by stories of abundance and generosity. A week ago, at the men's bible study, people spontaneously opened their wallets and gave money to buy bibles for people in prison. And every time the offering plate goes around...

And generosity is not limited to money and stuff, it is also connected to our time and talents... to being forgiving, to being loving, kind and gracious... This past month, I've seen families reschedule their lives to be with their loved ones... I've seen people sharing their time and talent in getting the parsonage ready... Huge, investments of time...

I've seen a team from our church feeding a hundred people at the Methodist church... I've seen people celebrate their anniversary by serving at coffee fellowship... People opening their hearts and sharing their time and treasure, being loving, kind and gracious...

In every way we love and help one another, we have been given a fore taste of that feast to come; we've glimpsed the economy in the Kingdom of God. And we are indeed richly blessed.

And let's remember, through God's love for us, God works miracles in our hearts—transforming our fear into faith and love. And just as Jesus fed the five thousand many years ago, Jesus now sends us out into the world... to love and serve the neighbor. And it's always God's work and our hands.

Now, how have you been involved with feeding the five thousand? Amen.