

Is There Enough?

When you are married to someone for a really long time you know so very much about them. You know about their secrets, their dreams, their quirks, their eccentricities, their surprises. Who would have guessed, for example, that Sandy's fair, blond, Scottish exterior cloaks a Jewish/Italian/Greek mother? Anyone who knows him well knows this because of the frequency, and predictability, with which he asks: "is there enough?" or "would you like some more?" and then, again, "are you sure there's enough?" If these questions fail to produce an affirmative answer he moves from the interrogative to the informational. "There is more in the kitchen." "There is another roast in the oven." "We can order more. I can go to the store." If the interrogative and the informational fail to produce the desired results Sandy moves to the imperative. "Here. Take some more." This is accompanied, in spite of protests, with food being spooned onto plates of the protester. "Just a little bit," he lies as he piles on the mashed potatoes. He cannot help himself. Years of coaching and behavior modeling have failed to change any of this. Here is the reason. Listen carefully, because it is the essence of the sermon, right here in the first paragraph. The reason is because he is innately generous. It is not just what he does it is who he is. It flows from him like water from a summer-in-thr-city fire hydrant, gushing uncontrollably over a delighted, dancing, grateful crowd. Generosity is not what he does; it is who he is. And that is what I want us to think about.

It is a ritual in our family, one that we have come to expect. It is one that has set scripts, one that includes me saying "San-dy" in shrill, nasal-y, New Jersey tone which I despise. It is one that includes grown women screaming Da-ad, making dad into two syllables instead of one. But

underlying this whole customary family ritual is the fear that there is not enough. It is rooted not only in his innate generosity, his genuine gift of hospitality and concern for guests, but also in his earliest memories of a world at war, a world in which, indeed, there was not enough, a world of waiting on line and making due, and then a post-war world that drove his mother to pack up four small kids and leave home for a new place that somehow promised there would be enough.

I thank Sandy for being the man that he is; I thank him for allowing me to rib him to make this point: most of us share his fear. Most of us have a deep fear of there not being enough—enough food to feed everyone who shows up unexpectedly, enough money, enough time, enough understanding, enough strength, enough endurance, enough patience, enough love, enough of us to go around. And that fear is the enemy of generosity, of a way of living that thrives on giving. Again. And that fear is the enemy of generosity, of a way of living that thrives on giving.

And so to John's story. There's still the hungry crowd. There's still the invitation to sit down. There's still five plus two and twelve. There's still the "but this little party will cost us a fortune, Jesus." The story in John does not follow the return of the twelve, does not emphasize their needs or Jesus' promises of a rest in a deserted place. John tells us of the crowd's motivation to follow; he writes that "...they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick." In other words, they want in on that healing action. They are not waiting on the shore but rather follow him up the mountain. We are told that it is near Passover, and that is a time when the symbols of that feast intensify the symbols of the miracle to come. And, most importantly for our learning today, it is Jesus who asks: "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" You see Jesus does not stop to analyze the cost, or how much

money he has in his checking account, or the size of the crowd. He has already seen the need and has moved beyond DO we feed them to HOW do we feed them. Putting that question on his lips leads to a different focus, a different a-ha. Philip still protests about how darn much it would cost to feed all these uninvited guests. But then there appears a boy, and that leads us to a powerful, insight. “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish.”

“There’s a boy who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they among so many people?” But what are they among so many people? Look at what happens here. Andrew delivers news of the resource and the limitation in one breath. This little kid has food, but there’s not enough. No way is there enough. In Andrew’s logical mind, the size of the crowd so dramatically dwarfs the food that the boy seems willing to share that he dismisses it. But as soon as Jesus hears what Andrews says Jesus says: “Tell the crowd to sit down. It’s time to eat.” Again, Jesus is coming from a different place. He is coming from a state of being. He is coming from who he is; he is coming from what is in him. Andrew speaks from his head; Jesus speaks from his heart, an innately generous heart.

Jesus hears the first sentence. “There is a boy here with five loaves and two fishes.” Andrew is blinded by the second. OK. Andrew is us. “But what are they among so many people?” is the question that haunts us, the question that limits us, the question that holds us back, the question that shuts us down. And it is the question that is answered over and over again in the Gospel of John.

One of the main themes of the Gospel of John is abundance. In the first chapter John writes: “From his fullness we have received grace upon grace.” There is enough. Abundance. At the wedding feast in Cana, when

the wine is running out, Jesus changes the water in six stone jars, each holding twenty or thirty gallons, into wine. That is enough even for Sunday night dinners. Abundance. To the Samaritan woman at the well Jesus says: “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” There is enough. Abundance. In his beautiful farewell speech in John Jesus says: “In my Father’s place there are many dwelling places.” There is enough room. Abundance. And if he added a chapter today John might write that when we can finally gather in person again around the table there is always enough food because we are together, because we showed up, because we came to listen, because we care about each other. It’s not about the lasagna, stupid. It’s about hospitality. There is enough. Abundance. Generosity is not a thing you do sometime. Gospel generosity is who you are. It is a way of being. We see this over and over again in the Jesus story. That is what he is about. He is about transforming people in so many ways, and when it comes to being generous it is understanding that generosity flows from within, from our very essence, our very being. As you follow Jesus it becomes who you are because there is enough. When you follow Jesus there is enough!

And so, because this is his theme, in John’s telling the boy brings the loaves and fish. The text isn’t explicit, but it doesn’t sound like the Andrew strong-armed him. It sounds like he said: here. I was on my way home from Wegman’s. I was on my way back from Panera. There are two sentences in verse nine. “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” You see our focus is supposed to be on the first line. Again and again over our 18 years of Gathering I have felt the joy and gratitude of seeing you reach out in faith and live that first line:

“There is a boy here with two barley loaves and fish.” They have focused on what they have. They have focused on possibility. They have not let “is there enough?” scare them away.

Think of the way over the years that you have brought the loaves and fishes. Remember the first days of Sisters Circle? Think of the one who started with what she had—five loaves?—and never imagined what it would become. She started with what she had and now lives of girls and young women are changed not by scarcity and fear but by abundance and action. And as others see what she brings they are inspired to share what they have. That is how it works. Creative giving and innate generosity do that. That is the way of miracles.

But always there are those who ask: Is there enough? There are so many children. What are you doing for the boys? And yet the “Andrews” who ask bring no bread, bring no fish. As I look at you today and remember so many others I am humbled by the impact of your innate generosity. The Spirit has worked through you again and again, and I am not sure we could measure the lives that have been touched by the Jesus in you. One? Ten? A hundred? A thousand? We will never know for it is the wrong question. And still the Andrews ask: Is this enough for there are so many really crazy people? There are those who bring fish and bread and cook and serve and feed and nurture those whose stories cause us to tremble. But there are so many hungry people. Is there enough? There are those who help the one who is sick, but there are so many sick. Is there enough?. There is one who sits with a friend who grieves. He brings his gift of presence and compassion. Is it enough? The message of the miracle is that Jesus uses what you bring. Jesus uses what you bring. The miracle starts with what you have, what you bring, what you are willing to share. The point is not that it is “just” five

loaves or two coins. The point is that you are responding to human need, to the longing and hunger of your brothers and sisters. And the more you realize that it is God who provides the more you have to give.

Each of us brings our loaves and fishes, but, as we bring them to share we are often stopped by Andrew's question. Is there enough? Is there enough? That is the demonic. It is a logical question; it is an understandable question. It is a question that we have been taught to ask at home, at school, at work, at church. It is a question that grows within us and creates more questions. Is there enough? Am I good enough? Am I smart enough? What can I do? How can I possibly help? Those questions, like Andrew's question in the context of this story, miss the potential for miracle. Generosity is a state of being, a way of the heart, who you are.

For almost twenty years since we have come together for the Gathering women and men, clergy and laity, Christians and Jews, blacks and whites, you name it, some so supportive, some skeptical, some well-meaning and some clandestinely mean ask me: how big is the Gathering? It is almost always the first question they ask. How many people do you have in worship? (Is there enough? Is there enough?) Andrew. Andrew. Andrew. They always, always, always ask me the Andrew question. How many? How many? Is that enough? I have heard many kind, well-intentioned people imply that I belong in a bigger church, that I deserve a bigger audience. That is the word they use. Audience. I understand that their intentions are often good, but I am not an entertainer, and you are not an audience. We, each of us individually, are that boy. We, together, are that boy. We have allowed ourselves to be held captive by the American model of success. How many? How much? What were the quarterly results? What is your percentage of growth? What is the bottom line? How many did you baptize? How many

were in Sunday School? How many were saved? As if I could have the audacity to answer that! Who am I, God?

Did you notice—did you notice—Jesus does not answer Andrew’s question. Listen to me. Jesus does not answer Andrew’s question. He is focusing on what the boy gave, what the boy shared, what the boy brought to the party. He is focusing on what is there, what he has to work with. Jesus uses these gifts to work his miracle. What each of us bring, what each of us offer, what each of us are willing to share is what matters. We do not know if or when or how God is going to use it. But I can tell you from knowing each of you that you are carrying a miracle with you today.

The world in which we live, the times in which we live, cry out for generous hearts and giving hands. The ones who seek to follow Jesus are called to an inner, divine motivation. This is not about being recognized. This is not about ego. This is not about status. This is not about fear of them having more and you having less. This is about that blessed internal impetus to respond generously because it is who you are. And when this is so you experience an inner affirmation and assurance of God’s presence and pleasure.

Hear these words from *Christian Century*:

Much of the time our faith mirrors that of Philip and Andrew, who would not see past the six months wages or the meager five loaves and two fish. We tend to base our living on our own scarcity or even on our own fears of insufficiency. So we hoard and save and worry and end up living life in small and safe measures. We pull back when we should push forward. We give in to our fear of a short-fall rather than exercising faith in God’s abundance. But Christians are constantly on call to go places where we have never been, to do things that we have never attempted and to be things we have never envisioned.

John 6 invites us to live into a grace-filled inheritance, a timely calling because most of us tend to live on the edges of what God has to offer. We are challenged to take seriously God's generous offer of life not, of course, so that we might end up being wealthy in this world, but so that we will position ourselves for the adventure of faith that enriches and enlivens those who embrace its challenge."¹

I know, because I know you and I know me, that the Andrew part of us will continue to haunt us with the question: is there enough. But let's make this the day when we focus on the answer, not on the question. Rewrite that one sentence and make yourself the subject. There is a boy here with loaves and fishes. There is each one of us, and each one of us carries within us the stuff of which miracles are made. When God works in you, when Jesus works with you, when the Spirit works through you, there is enough. Are you sure you don't want more mashed potatoes? There's more in the kitchen.

Amen

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The Gathering of Baltimore

November 8th, 2020

¹ Charles Hoffman, *More Than Enough* in *The Christian Century*, July 25, 2006, 18.