

Title: An Economy of Not Enough

Series: Stewardship 2022

Scriptures: Mark 8:1-9 and Mark 8:10-21

Date Used: November 20, 2022

Focus: Do we see things from an economy of abundance or of not enough? Time and again Jesus reveals what God can do with meager resources. So why do we continue to fear that we do not have enough and hold onto things with such fear?

We are almost two weeks out from our last election, and I imagine that by now you are missing all of the political ads.

I don't know about you, but I become troubled and somewhat disgusted by political ads. I find that the ads attack far more than they inform. From political ads, I find out more about what candidates think about one another than what they are going to seek to do when they are in office.

For the most part they strike me as being visionless. No one seems to talk about the direction we as a nation need to go, they seem to me more focused on their opponent's incompetence.

In my opinion, instead of focusing on the preferred picture of the future we need to move toward, the ads play on our fears... I believe the purpose of many of the political ads we see is an attempt to draw us into a perspective of scarcity. They try to paint a picture that there may not be enough – enough good jobs, enough income, enough medical care, enough Social Security funds, enough Medicare funds, enough of whatever. I keep getting the feeling that they are trying to convince me that if I vote for the wrong person my resources may begin to run dry and I will be left without enough.

I must watch myself, because if I am not careful, I find myself buying into this perspective of scarcity. And I end up fearing that there may not be enough.

Every three months I get a report from the United Methodist Board of Pensions which informs me about the state of my retirement plan. I never hesitated to open those quarterly reports until 2008, and then again, this past year. Until that time, I could always count on viewing a report that showed my investments were growing and that nest egg that will help see Suzanne and I through the golden years of our lives would always be increasing.

I remember opening a report in 2008 after the market had taken a dive and seeing that a good-sized chunk of that investment was gone. I was seized by fear. I thought, "What if this continues to happen? What will happen to us when we retired? Which of our three children are we going to move in with? Which of them would even have us?"

Over the past couple of years that pension fund has decreased again. Now, I could go on-line and check it every day. But I really don't want to know what it is doing every single day.

What concerns me the most about the political picture, what concerns me the most about my perspective on my retirement account is that I have bought into the idea that there is scarcity. I have bought into the picture that there may not be enough.... Like Jesus' disciples, I have allowed myself to be blind to what is before my eyes, and I have allowed myself to be unable to hear when it comes to hearing the stories of Jesus and about what God has done and God continues to do.

It is no coincidence that the confrontation that took place between Jesus and the disciples in the boat, immediately follows the feeding of 4000 people in the wilderness and then the feeding of the 5000. Mark places it where he does in his gospel intentionally.

For the second time the disciples have witnessed Jesus' compassionate response to human need. They have watched as Jesus gathers what resources are available – at the feeding of the 5000 it was five loaves of bread and two fish, at the feeding of the 4000 it was seven loaves of bread and a few fish.

When you study these miraculous feeding stories you realize they share a similar pattern. On each occasion after the bread and fish have been collected, Jesus gave thanks to God for them, he then broke the bread and had the disciples distribute it. He then had the disciples distribute the fish and the people were then fed. And on both occasions, the people were not only fed, but they ate until they were full. They received more than enough to eat.

At the feeding of the 5000, after the meal, there were twelve baskets of broken bread pieces and fish that were collected. At the feeding of the 4000 more than seven baskets of leftovers remained. That is more than what Jesus originally started with!

What does this say about God? What does this tell us about how God works? God's economy is not our economy. Our perspective is not a reflection of God's perspective. Where we see scarcity, God sees the potential for abundance. Where we see limited resources, God sees the potential to provide in abundance.

When we see a crowd of 5000 and we only have five loaves and two fish, we tend to focus on our lack of resources and our need to protect our own interests. We don't envision that there is enough bread and fish to feed an entire crowd let alone end up with 12 baskets of leftovers.

Where we see a crowd of 4000 and we see that we only have seven loaves of bread and a few fish, our anxiety about self-preservation begins to dominant our thinking. In the limited resources of seven loaves of bread and a few fish, we don't see enough resources to feed 4000. And we certainly can't envision baskets of leftovers.

The Gospel writer Mark is saying, God not only provides, and God not only provides enough for us to be filled, but God provides so abundantly that there is always more than enough, there are leftovers. Where God is allowed to reign, there is always abundance.

As the readers of these stories, we are invited to abandon our economy, our perspective of scarcity, and adopt the perspective of God's Reign, where there is always more than enough.

But how often after experiencing the wonders of God, do we slip back into our old ways of thinking?

How long does it take us to allow fear to hold a grip on our perspective once again?

The disciples have witnessed Jesus feed 5000, they have just watched as he fed 4000 and they have collected all of the leftovers. Then they get into the boat with Jesus and begin to cross the lake and as they travel, they begin to have a discussion. They are worried because they realize that they only have one loaf of bread.

Now based on what they have just witnessed they could have done some simple mathematical calculations and known that one loaf of bread will feed anywhere from 571 to 1000 people. But they couldn't see it.

This leads Jesus to have a discussion with them.

"Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not get it? Are you so trapped in your old-world view, that you can't get on board with what God is doing?"

"Do you have eyes, yet fail to see?"

"Do you have ears, yet fail to hear?"

"Don't you remember.... when I broke five loaves of bread and fed 5000, that there were 12 baskets of leftovers? Don't you remember earlier today when I broke seven loaves of bread and fed 4000, you collected seven baskets of leftovers?"

"Don't you get it?"

There is more than enough bread in the boat. There is more than enough to meet our needs and the needs of others.

Mark reveals that the real crisis is not the disciples going hungry. The real crisis is their failure to understand the nature of God.

New Testament scholar Van Bogard Dunn puts it so well in his commentary on this text. He writes, "The signs of the Kingdom of God have been given to the disciples in the words and deeds of Jesus; they have participated in the kingdom feast, not once, but twice; and still they are so dependent upon their own power and their own resources that they cannot trust the power of God and receive the inexhaustible gifts of grace. Their crisis is not that they have no bread but they have no faith." They fail to see the breaking of bread and the collection of leftovers as signs of the Reign of God, in which grace abounds in super-abundance for all our needs.

When we are afraid, we want to tighten our grip and hold on to what we've got. In fear we tightly hold and protect our own interests. When we are anxious about the future, we want to make sure we have a financial plan to take care of ourselves. Mark warns that such thinking is as far away from the perspective of God's reign as we can possibly get.

We need to loosen our grip. We need to relax and allow ourselves to really see what God is doing in the world. We need to allow ourselves to really hear the words of Christ.

When we truly understand, when we truly believe that God will supply for our every need, we can begin to relax our grip. We can be less anxious about our need to preserve what is in our own self-interest and become focused on what we can do to join in the work of Christ. We can become less focused on what we must hang onto and become more aware of what we can release from our grasp for the benefit of all of God's children.

In the Gospel writer John's version of the Feeding of the 5000, do you remember what occurs? It is a boy in the crowd that releases his grip on the five loaves of barley bread and two fish he has brought with him. It is from God multiplying the gift that the young boy gave that a miracle occurs and 5000 are fed.

When we are willing to let go of our anxiety about not having enough, we can begin to trust in God to supply for our lives over abundantly. When we are willing to release those resources to the work of God, we can begin to see what miraculous things God can do with what we have released from our anxious grip.

There were these two neighbors. Both were single and in their 50's. The one neighbor, Henry, was always examining his driveway for cracks, his rain gutters for any little leaks, his shingles. One day when he was outside maneuvering a ladder all around the perimeter of his house so he could examine his rain gutters and his shingles his neighbor Marvin went over to talk to him. "Henry, what are you doing?"

Henry replied, "I'm just checking my rain gutters and my shingles."

"Didn't you just do that a couple of weeks ago?"

Henry replied, "Yes, but you can never be too sure about these things. Something might have happened in the past two weeks. But I have money saved up just in case I have to get a new rain gutters and a new roof."

Marvin said, "Well, that's good."

Henry continued, "I also have funds set aside for a new driveway, a new furnace, new siding, new appliances, new...." And he just kept going on and on. Marvin was kind of shocked Henry didn't have a hair replacement fund for his dog because he seemed to have almost everything else covered."

Then Henry asked Marvin, "What about you? What disaster funds do you have in place?"

Marvin replied, "I have some money in the bank to cover things that might come up."

Henry kind of chided him, "What are you going to do if a lot of things happen at once?"

Marvin said, "I'd get rid of the house and move into an apartment!" Marvin continued, "Henry, I am going to hang on to some money to take care of things that come up. But I am not going to be so worried about things that could possibly take place that I don't support things that I believe are worthy in the here and now."

Henry said, "Here we go with that religious stuff again."

Marvin says, "Henry you can think what you want. But in my lifetime, God has supplied me with far more than I could ever possibly need, and I have no reason to believe that is going to stop now. So, I have no problem letting money pass through my hands so that it can benefit someone else. Furthermore, I have seen the amazing things that God has done with what I have allowed to pass through my hands. I am glad that I was a part of it."

Henry ignored him and moved his ladder to the other side of the house.

Throughout his ministry Jesus revealed there is more than enough. So, there is no need to be anxious. God provides abundantly and more than abundantly for our every need. So, we can relax our grip on what we have received from God and generously respond to the needs of the present.