

More than Enough: Living it, not just Saying it

based on Matthew 14:13-21

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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So, there is a lot going on in this art piece created by Jésus Mafa in 1973. That image of the feast on the hillside is full of chaos. A lot of people, a lot of logistical challenges. But somehow, in Matthew's version of it, Jesus breaks through the chaos with a sense of certainty, and what seemed little food at first somehow feeds the thousands.



How it happened is a mystery. It is supposed to be a bit mysterious. Let me leave that question out there, though: *How could this miracle of enough food for the masses happen?*



I was out in a strawberry field with my family recently, and I was mesmerized by the number of bright red, juicy strawberries. We all had our own baskets in different rows, and we each had our technique. One was way ahead, probably missing some great strawberries, while another was way behind, obviously being a bit more diligent about picking all the ripe strawberries. As I was finishing my shift in the strawberry patch, my basket full, I stood up, but as I walked away, I kept seeing strawberries, and so tempted to stop and top up my basket. I could have done that all afternoon.

My mind wandered to another experience: the Buffet table. You know. Those vast troughs, sometimes more vast than others, at restaurants. It begins well, with a game plan that starts with salad, but then, somehow, I just can't help myself, scooping a little of this and some of that. The entrée is never just one item, it often has more than one option! Why don't I save myself time, and take some of each?

You get my point. Don't we live in what I might label an all-you-can-eat style of consumerism. It is the air we breathe – a little more... and a little more... and, how about one more.

Such would not have been the case for Jews and Gentiles in Jesus' time. How did they make those loaves and fishes go so far? I suspect that they would have operated like a community, loving their neighbours, the most vulnerable served first. Miraculous and mysterious, however I try to understand this spiritual moment that Matthew obviously makes to look echo the Hebrew Scripture story of Yahweh providing manna for hungry, ornery Israelites in the wilderness. This story of feeding the thousands hints at Jesus blessing and breaking the bread at his last supper with his friends.

How do I know that they would have acted in a way that demonstrated their believe that they had more than enough – there on that hillside, sharing bread and fish, that day?

Some of you know my story, that I worked for a short time, living in Bethlehem, in the West Bank, monitoring the situation faced by Palestinians and Israelis struggling for justice and peace in apartheid conditions.¹ I was on a transit bus travelling out of Bethlehem, Palestinians young and old looking remarkably like travellers I would see on a bus in Sudbury, with one exception.

A young man was sitting in a spot designated for people with mobility issues or mothers-to-be. The bus stopped, and on came a frail, elder, a woman, who was looking to the back of the bus, when, without any hesitation, a stranger stood up. The man addressed the young man in the specially designated seat in Arabic, and I could have guessed what he said. The young man, a little embarrassed, stood up and walked to the back of the bus, so the gentleman could then usher the elder woman to the special seat.

If only we could live out that community ethic in the way we share food, the way we pay taxes, so that everyone gets to enjoy the abundance of our world.

Hunger is not caused by a shortage of food; there is more than enough food to feed the world. Hunger and need are a result of a distribution problem, what I would call a “buffet” mentality in our 1/3 of the world that holds the majority of the resources. Add to the whole equation of hunger climate change, and countries facing extreme weather like droughts and floods, slowly learning new agricultural practices. At the end of the day, 2/3 of our world still struggles to feed their families, knowing that there is an abundance elsewhere.

I glanced at a United Nations report that gave me reason to hope, suggesting that the situation of hunger in 2/3 of the world is getting better, even if slowly, thanks to more sharing of resources and knowledge.²

It is a miracle, however you look at the story, in Jesus’ time or our modern time, of people getting fed. It is not just about being fed nourishing food, in ancient and modern times. The “spiritual” food must be shared too, of hope and kindness and justice – and, perhaps, this food is just as essential.

How do we share gestures and messages of hope, especially for those who live in the fringes of community?

How do we share the bread of kindness, especially to those who rarely even get a passing glance?

How do we live each day, sharing – love, our resources, kindness – because we know that that there is more than enough?

The world might tell us not to worry about these things. Jesus, I suggest, might tell us that the miracle of sharing is possible, and that miracle needs our involvement. Amen.

¹ The Programme is called, the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), run by the World Council of Churches. Every 3 months volunteers from around the world form a new time. See <https://eappi.org/en/>

² United Nations News: Global perspective Human stories, 3 October 2019. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/10/1048452#:~:text=Enough%20food%20is%20produced%20today,%2C%20worldwide%2C%20receives%20sufficient%20food%3F>