

# Sermon Text for September 15, 2024

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

## *II Kings 4:1-7, Matthew 14:13-21* *“When God multiplies”*

I got a panicked phone call on Thursday and this person who is one of us said I had a person drop out of a tournament for Friday, I know that you just got back, but can you play in the Hope International tournament on Friday. It was a busy time getting back but who am I to say no to a member in need? In my group were all people whose vocation was working with other peoples' money in order to maximize it for the kingdom of God and for the use of that individual. I was with an accountant, a fund manager, and broker or investor, and then me.

We spent the next five hours together reflecting on and discussing the theology of abundance. What is the theology of abundance you may ask, it is the perspective that all that we have is understood as a gift from God so that you never find yourself feeling as if you don't have enough or that you need more, because what you have is sufficient and abundant for what you need in your life. What a difference it makes to wake up in the morning and say to yourself, let's see how I can use the resources that God has given me to make a difference, as opposed to waking up every morning and saying how can I make more so that I can have more. Because you will never feel like it is enough.

This life perspective of need versus abundance is such a stark contrast and I would argue that we probably don't talk enough about it in the church. This is not a stewardship sermon on tithing, this is a radical change of perspective that ought to happen when we give our life to Christ that we actually believe that all of our needs are met because that is a promise that he gives to his disciples. We tend to approach life the way that it is commonly approached in our culture and society. We are told on tv that we never have enough of anything and that we need not only more of everything but the best of everything.

This approach is based upon the false understanding that we are all operating under limited resources. We can't do everything, we are told, because we don't have the resources to do everything, which eventually becomes anything, we can't do anything because we don't have the resources for it. So then we go in the direction of making decisions based upon what we presently have and what we don't have.

Both of our Scriptures today present a completely different world view from that. We have been following along in Matthew and consistently we have been talking about this Gospel

of righteousness where we are told to act according to the will of God and this perspective, a theology of abundance as opposed to what we are taught in culture to live according to a lifestyle of need, this is the righteousness that we are commanded to have. What if you could wake up tomorrow and think to yourself, you know what, I have everything I need. Having a relationship with Jesus provides this perspective. How would your life, your decision making, your perspective change if you realized that Jesus' promises of provision apply not just to eternal life, but to today as well. Let's read.

## **READ**

All four of our Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John contain this story of the multiplication of the loaves and the fish. It is the only story in the Bible that every single one of the Gospels addresses so that should tell us something. This is a really important story not just for the life of Jesus, but for laying the foundation and the framework for what Jesus came to do as Savior and Lord. You need to know this story and you need to know what this story is teaching you because all of the writers considered it important so we ought to consider it important as well.

It begins with Jesus hearing and reacting to the death of his cousin, John the Baptist. What happens next is his reaction out of grief of the death of this close family member to him. He goes away by himself, on a boat, to get away from the crowds, to get away from the disciples, just so that he could have some alone time in his grief. As he does so the crowds see his boat from the shoreline and they follow him along the shoreline so that they can see where he is going to land so that they can be there when he lands. This story is framed within the context of the grief of Jesus over the death of his cousin.

When he lands his heart melts because he has compassion for the people. The Scripture tells us that he heals them and other Gospels mention that he taught them, he was completely caught up in the compassion that he had for them so much so that time became insignificant, until the disciples make it significant and interrupt what he is doing to bring a problem before him.

“Jesus, it is getting dark, we are really in a deserted place, can you send the people away so that they can get something to eat and we can have our dinner, find it somewhere in one of these villages?” When we were in Iceland we drove completely around the Island, we had the most amazing experiences which included waterfalls, calving glaciers into the water just as we arrived, geysers, hot springs, wind that almost knocked us over as we descended a mountain. Too many experiences to tell, all of them touched by God and blessed by our fellowship as a

family. But there was one time when we realized that we were driving for hours on end and we didn't see a single sign of civilization. We were getting pretty low on gas and according to Bethany's GPS we would make it to a gas station, but with only like 20km to spare. We made it, but it was an experience that we don't really have here, where you can consistently drive for hours over stretches of days and not see anything, it really was a rugged and deserted landscape.

That's what Jesus' disciples were saying in vs.15, not only is it dark, but his place is deserted. We have a problem Jesus. They came up with a solution for Jesus to follow. Send the people away and then we can all fend for ourselves and get what we need on our own. They always seem to be sending people away when they identify what might be a problem. Remember the young parents with their children when they prevented their children from getting close to Jesus. Yeah, Jesus wasn't happy about that, or the blind man on the side of the road who kept calling out to Jesus to heal him, send him away, ignore him Jesus. Yeah, Jesus didn't do that either. The disciples constantly appear to us as taking actions that we might take if we have a mentality that somehow Jesus has to be protected from the people and we want him all to ourselves.

The widow similarly in II Kings presents Elisha with a problem. I am broke, my kids are about to be taken from me to be sold into slavery, what do I do? In both of these stories the solution to the problem is tackled the same way. Elisha asks the widow what do you have? Jesus is told by the disciples what they have. From the outside looking it is clearly not enough, it can't even come close to scratching the surface of the need that presents itself. But instead what we find is that what they have is actually not only sufficient to meet and handle the problem at hand, it actually is able to be multiplied to the extent that the widow and her children could live off of it for the rest of their lives and the disciples were able to gather enough left overs for future meals themselves.

Let's not just pass over this. Five loaves is not enough. But Jesus uses what is given and multiplies it. A little bit of oil is not enough, but God is able to provide an abundance which eliminates the theology of need in which this widow and her family were operating. You know, one aspect of this story that I love that we often overlook. The widow gets her kids involved so that they can see this transition from a theology of need, we don't have enough, we don't have what we need, to a theology of abundance as a direct result of the multiplication which God has done. How do our children view our perspective as a family. Are we always saying that we don't have enough, or are we approaching our family theology out of abundance and thanksgiving for what God has given us.

The church similarly at times can fall into the trap of thinking that it doesn't have what it needs. I have always said from the day I stepped into this church, that we should never make decisions based out of what we think we have or don't have. We make decisions based upon what we believe God is calling us to do for the kingdom of God. German Embassy story. If we make decisions as a church based upon a theology of need which only looks at our current resources then we are going to completely miss the blessings that can come about as a result of trusting that God is actually at work multiplying and providing and that our abundance is a result of God's work and action.

Jesus in this miracle story commands the disciples in the face of what was obvious lack of resources to, look at vs.16 you feed the people. The disciples respond by saying we don't have the resources to feed the people. They are no longer our responsibility because we simply do not have the resources. That's the excuse we see given for so many decisions that are made, not just in the church, but in the world around us. We can't be responsible because we don't have the resources.

Let me ask you a series of questions and I'm curious about how you would answer, they are all rhetorical, but they are all important. Are members of this church our responsibility? I mean, should we not hesitate to use our resources to address the needs, spiritual and physical, of the members of this church. I think we can all agree that yes, we should. What about those in our preschool the families and children, are they our responsibility as well? We might get a mixed answer, you know how I'm going to answer, of course they are. What about this community as a whole, are they within our realm of responsibility to care for and not to say that we don't have the resources to address the needs? What about in our country, people who are hungry, people who are dying to get in and are in need, are they our responsibility as a church? Do we use our resources to care for them, or are we given the green light to say that no, that is someone else's responsibility.

A theology of abundance never allows us to say that we do not have the resources to care for people who are in need, locally, nationally, all over the world. We address the need and trust that God will multiply. Church, we have seen God multiply our resources, we of all people have to believe that it is going to keep happening so that the doors are flung open to our generosity and our good stewardship. They are not contradictory terms, they feed off each other. If we think we don't have enough, then we will never feel like we have enough. If we believe that God has provided and will provide, then God's abundance will always be present and we can make decisions based upon that perspective. We have seen it, we have lived it together.

A personal relationship with Jesus touches and impacts everything. This story reminds us of the promise, both present and future, of the provision of God, of the abundance of God, of God multiplying. When we walk with Jesus then we turn our back on a theology of need or want or limited resources. We don't make our decisions based upon our perception of need, but we are called to look at the world through a theology of abundance, of God not just being able to, and not just promising, but actually multiplying. If we make decisions with the mind set that I already have what I need, I don't need more and whatever more there is, is a gift, a direct act of multiplying by God, well, then everything changes. Amen.