

More Than Enough

The definition of enough is a simple concept when found in the dictionary. Enough is that amount or quantity that is necessary, enough is that amount which is required. But something seems to happen to the concept when we take it out and try to apply it to specific things in our lives. As someone who has had a lifelong issue with being overweight, enough is obviously a concept that I have been given a lot of advice about. My father was very firm in his conviction that if something was on your plate—you needed to eat it, after all there were all those children who didn't have enough to eat. I never could figure out why that meant I had to eat what was on my plate, but it did. I once made the mistake of asking that my uneaten portion be given away...which seemed to me a suggestion which would aid them whereas my finishing whatever was on my plate obviously wouldn't. You can guess how well that went over. The dieticians who have given me advice is for me to use smaller plates so that smaller portions will fill the plate and thus fool my mind (and theoretically my stomach) into thinking that I have had enough to eat when it is less than I normally have. Another often heard saying from my childhood which I admit to saying to my children in their turn when they had loaded their plates with a favorite food and then didn't want to eat what was remaining on their plates was "your eyes were bigger than your stomach." These examples outline some of the issues related to defining "enough" in real terms. These examples illustrate the rather flexible nature of this concept. Determining what is "enough" is based in an area where the judgment is not concrete but relative depending upon the particular situation. These illustrations are based on the usual assumption that we make that there is a defined quantity of resource which is available to us for our consumption. They are also based on the observations that whatever the resource, we want to ensure that we have whatever the amount which is enough. In other words, our world-view describes everything in terms of a finite amount, and these days it seems that the view now includes the feeling that that finite amount available is shrinking. In many ways the gospel passage before us this morning is about a totally different world-view; the world view which Jesus is teaching those he meets brings the message of abundant life, a world view where all can be fed and satisfied with the available resources. Two weeks ago, we read the passage just before and just after Mark's description of this same event which the gospel of John presents in today's passage. The narration of both these gospels tell us that Jesus comes ashore "on the other side" of the Sea of Galilee to be greeted by a large crowd who have followed him. John tells us that the crowd is there because "they saw the signs he was doing for the sick." Mark tells us that when Jesus saw the crowds he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd so he spent the day teaching them many things John does not explicitly say anything about teaching, but he tells us that Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples which was the traditional setting for teaching. Although neither account tells us that Jesus healed folks brought to him on this occasion, the reason he has been followed in both cases is that those in the crowd are seeking something from him because they recognize him as being someone with solutions for their needs. Details for what happens next vary. Mark tells us the disciples want to send the people away because there are no resources available for feeding the crowd. John presents the food issue a little differently. John tells us that Jesus initiates the issue of feeding the crowd by asking Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" John adds an aside in the narrative. "He said this to test him, for he

himself knew what he was going to do.” John then records Philip’s response, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a mite.” Here it is not that there is no bread available, but the cost would be great—six months’ wages would only buy enough for each person to get a mite.” And we know that getting a mite would not be enough to satisfy hunger. This response of the disciples, however phrased, illustrates the two different world views about resources which were present then—and still are with us today. On the surface when encountering this narrative it looks just like one of the miracle stories told of Jesus. However, it stands apart because it is the only miracle story told in all four of the gospels. Like all the miracle stories there are those who seek to find explanations for the physical details of what happened. But asking questions about those details misses the point. The point is that Jesus’ disciples come to the situation with the reigning expectation, that overarching, governing attitude that there’s just not going to be enough. Philip says it first with his comment about six months’ wages, but Andrew and Simon chime in with the same tune. “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” Jesus assumes the exact opposite posture. He simply trusts that with God there’s always somehow enough. So Jesus takes what is available—five loaves and two fish—gives thanks and begins the distribution to those whom he had take a seat on the green grass. He does the same thing for the fish—giving out as much as was wanted. John tells us that when they were satisfied—when they were satisfied, not when the resource was depleted—the disciples were sent out to gather up the fragments. When those left over fragments were gathered up the disciples had twelve full baskets—so there was more than enough supplied. The point which is subtly being illustrated in this narrative is about that word enough. The realist in me often takes the view of the disciples. Like the rest of the world I usually feel that there is not enough for all that I want. But the follower of Jesus in me who trusts finds that there’s always more than enough for all that I need to be fulfilled. I know me well enough—I know human nature well enough—to understand my wants, our wants have this way of being insatiable. There’s something in the human being that always itches for more and bigger, more and bigger. And in the end, it becomes a fact there usually isn’t enough for everything you want. But the way God works in the world is that there always has been, and there always is, and there always will be, more than enough for everything that we need to be fulfilled. As I mentioned earlier, John’s narration of this story has some subtle edges, things that are easy to miss in our English translations. The Greek text first presents the geographic details given in this narrative a little differently. First, John tells us that the people followed Jesus around the Sea of Galilee—the sea which allowed them to see Jesus crossing—a sea with quiet waters. Then when they have arrived on that hillside, as he prepares to feed them Jesus makes them sit down on the green grass. The Greek reads that Jesus makes them recline or lie down in the green pastures. He then provides them with an abundance of food—figuratively setting a table before them. Does this begin to sound familiar? Anyone of Jewish background would have been familiar, as we are, with the details of the 23rd Psalm. “He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters...you prepare a table before me...and my cup overflows.” There is more than enough. As I was think of this I thought of how what we find in this feeding of the five thousand echoes the sacrament we celebrated last week—the giving of thanks for bread and cup which Jesus did before giving them to the disciples. The way that the bread we break and the cup we pour are to be indications of abundance.— I also thought of a poem which my

mother wrote which she entitled “sipping from the saucer”. My mother did not have an easy life. Her father died when she was about 10 or 11 from a mill accident. Because my grandmother did not have the resources to provide for her and her two siblings, as the youngest child she was sent to a home for orphans. She finished high school there but could not afford to go to college. Instead she went to work. She then helped her mother provide for the three half-sisters she now had from her mother’s remarriage. She worked in the sewing room of Cannon Mills in Kannapolis and retired from there. She could have looked around and felt that she had never had enough. Yet this poem she wrote was one of thanksgiving for all the blessings she had received. In it she gave thanks that she was able to sip from the saucer of the cup of blessings which overflowed from her Lord. The cup that overflowed was the cup of grace. She knew she didn’t need the whole content of the cup, the blessings which overflowed were sufficient. She had more than enough in her life to know that she was blessed—that what she needed was provided. That is the message that we have from this narrative about the feeding of the five thousand—God’s grace is abundant providing for all that we need to be fulfilled and to live that life which Christ declared that he had come down to provide—the bread of life given so that we could have life abundant. We are blessed with more than enough. Thanks be to God.