

Enough?

Enough? Just what does enough mean? How do we determine what amount of anything is enough? These days usually when you want to clarify the meaning of a word, the simplest method is to Google the meaning of a word; the online response from your smart phone or computer will provide you with a dictionary based response with several meanings and uses. Not so, with this word. Instead what came up was one word which seems to be really a synonym—sufficient. Webster’s however had a more traditional looking meaning; a longer explanation of the meaning, although I am not sure that it is really that different. Enough is defined this way there: enough is as much or as many as necessary, as desired or as tolerable. Or as Google put it more simple—to be enough is to be sufficient. In other words, enough is something that we as human beings find very a very fluid concept...one that in our constant efforts to ensure that we have, we often find ourselves very far from where we thought we were headed. The concept of what it is that constitutes “enough” is at the center of what Isaiah’s message to the people of Israel. It is also at the center of many of the parables of Jesus. It is also at the center of many of the problems of our society...that determination of what is enough. Through Isaiah, the Lord asks the people this question: “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” Isaiah was addressing the leaders of the people. Judah was still a kingdom, although a puppet nation. They were who still living in the Promised Land but had turned away from the Lord, seeking alliances and ways of life outside of the covenant which they thought would reward them with power and riches. The pattern of turning away from what is truly nourishing was the norm even then...God’s ways which provide true satisfaction, enduring nourishment are often less attractive in the near term to human eyes. That was true in Isaiah’s time. It has often been true even to this very day. Within Isaiah’s work we find the promise that God will continue to reach out to provide for the nourishment that truly satisfies. We find the promise of the coming Messiah which was fulfilled in Jesus. Today’s passage from Matthew’s narrative about the life of Jesus addresses this same concern about providing nourishment. This is a very rich text in many ways...not only in relationship to the meal which we will share together in a short time...but also with regard to the other ways which Jesus seeks to provide nourishment here. This passage is often considered at the same time that we celebrate our sacrament of Communion because of the obvious connection of the meal that is provided, yet the nourishment given in the text and in our lives is much richer. Our passage begins: “Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself.” If you stop a moment with this beginning, and consider the context it doesn’t seem like the set up for the feeding of a large crowd...not just the elements we usually consider as the basis of the miracle, but Jesus is withdrawing to be by himself because he has heard something that has distressed him. What he has heard is the news of the death of John the Baptist brought to him by John’s

disciples. In our confessions we celebrate that Jesus came as our Lord, but also came as a man fully human. Jesus, fully human, has just gotten this distressing news and has like most of us seeks to find some privacy to grieve, to go to a deserted place by himself. We are not told what time of day that Jesus gets this news, but he gets into a boat and crosses the Sea of Galilee, going to an area that is deserted. But what happens. The waters of the sea are long and narrow, the crowds who know who Jesus is see him get in the boat, and from the various towns surround the areas they come on foot to the area where he comes ashore. It is no longer the deserted place he sought. Jesus does not get the alone time he sought. Instead we are told: "When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd and he had compassion for them and cured their sick." As soon as he has gotten out of the boat, Jesus has begun providing, giving nourishment to the crowd that has gathered to greet him. Jesus nourishes them by sharing his presence with them even though his desire was to seek a deserted place to be alone. Now we are told that as evening is coming, and the disciples are becoming worried about the situation. "When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.'" It would seem that the disciples, seeing the position of the sun in the sky are being pragmatic and considerate. They are probably thinking of the welfare of all these people who are going to need to eat pretty soon, so they should probably be sent on their way, pretty soon. Right? This certainly sounds practical, as do many of the solutions to problems that are offered today. But they are also often ways of distancing the source of the problem...making the problem go somewhere else and not really resolving it. If the crowd goes away, then how they are fed is not the disciples' problem. They don't have to look for another solution. Since the crowds who were following Jesus were largely the poor, the homeless and until he had healed them earlier in the day, ones who would probably not have had the resources to buy food in the villages, the disciples' suggestion would not have provided nourishment for the crowds. The disciples' suggestions were like many of the ones made today, only removing the problem from obvious sight not resolving it. Jesus did not accept that. "Jesus said to them, 'They need not go away; you give them something to eat.'" Their reply was to give Jesus a list of what they had which was obviously not enough..."They replied, 'We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.'" Five loaves and two fish. They had what they had started the day with prepared for themselves, not being prepared for others to join them. They saw what they had as enough for them...But then Jesus had a different viewpoint. "And he said, 'Bring them here to me.'" Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds." In these verses we have the clear anticipation of the remembrance meal we celebrate, the giving thanks before the breaking of the bread before the distribution...but even more we have what should be the understanding and the illumination of the transition from a vision of scarcity which is our normal view to that of God's

view...plenty...abundance...more than enough. For we are told that ALL ate and were filled. Not just that ALL ate, but also that all were filled. All had enough. In fact, the passage continues by telling us that "they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full." There was more than enough. We are not told exactly how much bread was there, how much fish was there. But the crowds totaled about five thousand men, besides women and children. In those days, numerically women and children didn't deserve to be counted...but it was noted that they were present...and were actually probably present in a greater number than were the men. So the amount of bread and fish that it took to provide enough to satisfy that number of people and leave enough left over to fill twelve baskets would have been a very large amount indeed. But is that the real miracle of the narrative? As we prepare to come to the Table where we celebrate what the Lord has provided for our nourishment, what is the message from this text for us today? Perhaps this story our Lord is also speaking to us about what the reign of God is like...that where we as humans see scarcity of resources we should instead look and see God's abundant provision. Perhaps this narrative should remind us to give thanks and see if what we have is actually more than enough if we carefully examine our resources for possibilities to see what could be done with them through the view of confident sharing of abundance rather than fearful hoarding of scarcity. Because to some extent the way we move through the world depends on how we view this question of what is enough. When do we have enough? How do we define enough? And how is "enough" distributed? Jesus had some definite things to say about these things and how they would be done within the reign of God. Jesus saw the crowds and had compassion upon them even though he wished for some private time. He spent his day healing them and then providing for them. Both the compassion and the healing are miracles of our Lord's provision given to us through the Lord's presence with us. When we come to the Table, the Lord is our host and the nourishment waiting for us is always enough for our needs. We come, we are nourished, strengthened and enabled to continue as those who are citizens of the reign of God where abundance rules. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.