

What's in your hand?
Exodus 4:1-6, Matthew 15: 29-39

A Million dollars in a minute?

On a beautiful Sunday afternoon, a man was laying on the grass relaxing as he stared at the clouds. Then, he decided to talk to God.

"God", he said, "how long is a million years?"

Surprisingly, God answered, "In my frame of reference, it's about a minute."

The man asked, "God, how much is a million dollars?"

God answered, "it's a penny."

After a brief moment of silence, the man cautiously asked, "God, can I have a penny?"

God said, "Sure. In a minute."¹

This is a funny story but it certainly bears truth about God's abundance. God lacks nothing. Rather God created the world out of God's overflowing abundance and made the world abundantly. The first chapter of Genesis is a song of praise for God's generosity and abundance. It keeps saying, "it's good. It's good. It's very good!" Our generous God creates the world abundantly. One of the most influential biblical scholars, Walter Brueggemann said, "The power of the future lies not in the hands of those who believe in scarcity but of those who trust God's abundance." But we do not often feel God's abundance. We often feel that we don't have enough.

We don't have enough

Today's scripture is a story of feeding the four thousand people with seven loaves of bread and a few small fish. Because of Jesus' powerful teaching and miracles, a huge crowd followed him and listened to his teaching for three days and they had nothing to eat. Jesus told his disciple "I can't send them away without a meal—they'd probably collapse on the road." Basically, Jesus was saying, "You feed them." Then, his disciples replied, "But where in this deserted place are we going to dig up enough food for a meal?"

¹ <http://aumamen.com/joke/god-how-long-is-a-million-years-to-you>

I don't know how you feel but I can understand the disciples' concerns. I admire Jesus' compassion toward the crowd but I can more easily relate with pragmatic disciples than with compassionate Jesus. Jesus seems to be unrealistically altruist. Does Jesus' request of his disciples to feed them make sense to you? It sounds like requesting that our church host a church supper for four thousand hungry guests. If I proposed a mission plan for feeding three thousand hungry kids during the summer in and around our town, would you say "aye" without hesitation? I believe that you would do so... so I am not going to ask it. But we need to consider the available budget and man-power. I don't want to put a huge burden upon David and ruin Lee's summer vacation.

As the son of God, Jesus might not have to worry about resources but the disciples did. "Where in this deserted place are you going to dig up enough food for a meal?" They were saying that it was impossible to feed them all. The disciples knew Jesus but they still didn't have faith in him so they tried to solve the problem in terms of their own capacity.

Like the disciples, we often face the same challenge. We don't have enough to help others. Last Monday, I was in the church office and happened to receive a phone call asking for help with the cost of a hotel. I felt sorry for the person but I had to consider our available budget and the policy of the church. We don't have enough to support all requests for financial assistance. We feel that we don't have enough. Except for some mega churches, I bet many churches often feel the same way.

As I worked as a teaching assistant in a preaching class, one of students shared a story of her home church. Her home church is a small congregational church built in 1730. It is located in typical upper middle class New England suburb. The majority of the community lives in relative wealth, yet amidst this wealth are at least two hundred and ten hungry families. Rev. Peggy, the pastor of the church, knew it. The town food pantry does what it can but there is not enough particularly, when Thanksgiving is coming. As we know, thanksgiving is a big celebration day and a day for a lavish turkey dinner. But for those hungry families, a Thanksgiving dinner is just like any other dinner and many children will go to bed hungry.

So Pastor Peggy wanted to provide enough food for a celebratory feast on Thanksgiving but providing food for two hundred and ten families seems overwhelming for a small church. Doesn't it? Pastor Peggy didn't know what to do or how to help. She was overwhelmed and felt like there were no resources. She didn't have enough. It is hard to help others when our baskets are empty.

Jesus feed the people

While the disciples attempted to politely educate their teacher about the reality of their situation, Jesus asked, "How much bread do you have?" Seven loaves plus a few fish," said the disciples. Jesus directed the people to sit down and he took the bread and the fish. After giving thanks, he divided it up and gave it to the people. Everyone ate. They had all they wanted. There was more than enough so it took seven large baskets to collect the leftovers. Jesus used the small gifts in the disciples' hands to feed four thousand hungry people. Seven loaves of bread seem insufficient and insignificant for the multitude of people. But what appeared to be insufficient and insignificant became sufficient and significant when they were placed in the hands of Jesus!!! And I believe this is the important principle we need to personally apply.

God wants us to bring what we have to Him. The size, the quantity or the quality does not matter. It's not what you bring, but whom you are bringing it to. That matters! God can do so much with just a little. God asked Moses what was in his hand. Moses had only an old staff that he had used to keep his sheep. A wooden staff in Moses' hands is insignificant and insufficient but as he brought it to God, it became the most powerful instrument for the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt. When God first called Moses, did he feel that he had enough power and resources to liberate his people from slavery? Never! But God works with what was in his hands.

Like Moses and the disciples, we often feel that our contribution to Jesus is inadequate and insufficient, but God can use and multiply whatever we give to God. You may feel that you don't really have anything to offer to God. But remember Jesus can use and multiply whatever we give Him. It can be our talents, our time, our treasure, or our loving heart for our neighbors. So what will you bring to God? God will take whatever you bring; God will bless it, and

then use it to touch many people. Remember, it's not the amount of the gift, but rather into whose hands the gift is given.

Let's go back to the story of pastor Peggy. Peggy realized she could not solve her problem alone. She took her concern to God. She told God there were hungry people and there were empty baskets. Then she waited for instructions. Eventually she discerned God telling her to fill the church with food. So she got on the phone and starting asking people to help. She called the interfaith clergy group, she called the boy scouts, she called the rotary, she called local farmers, she called grocery stores.

She spent a lot of time, planning, coordinating, and dealing with committees. The weekend before Thanksgiving the baskets began to fill. Friday morning a famer turned Peggy's office into a temporary root cellar over flowing with fresh organic carrots, onions, potatoes, squash, green beans, and celery. The basket was full. Saturday the boy scouts sat in front of Shaws, and Market Basket collecting pies. By Saturday afternoon almost three hundred pies were stacked on the conference room table. The basket was full. Saturday evening Rotarians dropped off two hundred and fifty frozen turkeys. The basket was full. Sunday morning faith communities from all over town brought can goods, stuffing mix, stock, and juice. They filled the fellowship hall. The basket was full. Sunday afternoon youth groups from churches, temples, and mosques all over town came together to sort the food. They turned fellowship hall into a grocery store. All of the baskets were full. On that night, two hundred and ten families came, went shopping for Thanksgiving dinner and went home ready to celebrate. After the last family left, there was still an abundance of food. The food pantry was stocked. The baskets were overflowing. "Everyone ate. They had all they wanted. It took seven large baskets to collect the leftovers," says the Bible. I believe this story can be today's version of "miracle of feeding four thousand people."

A community came together, listened to God, worked hard to follow God's instructions. They worked with God to create abundance. They have done the same thing every year for the last twenty years. Every year the basket was full. Every year families have enough to celebrate. This event does not solve the

world hunger problem. It does not even solve the town's hunger problem. But it creates enough for an abundant celebration.

It all started with the small offering of heart by Pastor Peggy. She didn't have enough money. She didn't have enough manpower within the church. All she had was like the insignificant and insufficient seven loaves bread and a few small fish the disciples had. But as she offered it to the hands of God for the sake of hungry families and kids, God turned this small gift into abundant banquets for all the families in the town.

My friends, our church may be small and weak. But we still have bread to offer God for the sake of people around us. We have something in our hands. What's in your hands? What's in your hands? During the week, please think of what's in your hands to offer God for the sake of people around us. And offer it to God's hands and God will bless them, multiply them and creates abundance for all people!

What's in your hands?

So what's in your hands? God asked Moses, "what's in your hand?" Moses replied "only an old staff to protect sheep" and God made it to be a staff to protect and liberate the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt.

What's in your hands? God asked David. David replied "only five smooth stones" and God made them to be the most powerful weapon that brought down ten-foot tall giant, Goliath and brought the salvation of Israel from the Philistines.

What's in your hands? Elijah asked The Widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17). She replied, "a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a bottle." With faith, as she brought them to the hand of God, God created abundance and "the jar of flour and the bottle of oil were not emptied."

What's in your hands? Jesus asked his disciples and they replied, "only seven loaves of bread and a few small fish" and Jesus Christ created abundance that was enough to feed four thousand hungry people."

What's in your hands? Is it small and insignificant? Don't worry! Just bring them to the hands of our Savior and our Christ will finish the last of the work to save our broken world through us. Amen.