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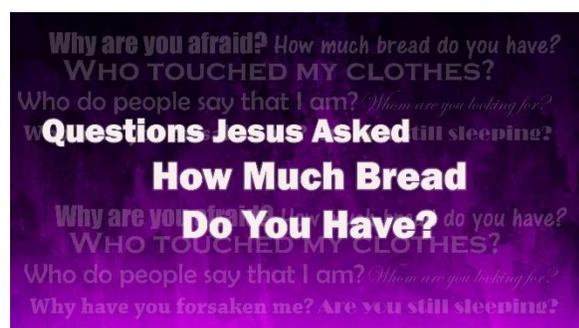
Title: How Much Bread Do You Have?

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Today, we are three weeks into our six-week journey to Easter. Throughout this season we are looking at a sampling of the many questions that Jesus asked. First, it was on the boat with his disciples amid a storm, when he asked, "why are you afraid?" I believe Jesus was asking his disciples to let their faith guide them instead of

their fear. Last week, the question that Jesus asked was, "who touched my clothes." An outcast woman was brought into the family of God because of the compassion of Jesus.

This week, it's a rerun. I love reruns. I'm not a guy that likes much suspense in my life so I know if I watch reruns, I know how it's going to end. When I was in college, my favorite show was M*A*S*H. I even scheduled college classes around my need to be back to the dorm in time for M*A*S*H reruns. For my boys, it is easier with on-demand streaming but they still have favorites to see over and over again - The Curse of Oak Island and Top Gear are on their list.

The story of the feeding of the multitude that Mark tells us in chapter 8 of his gospel seems to be a rerun of the story he has just told in chapter 6. We didn't look at the chapter 6 story on our way to this morning but it's there and Jesus asks the same question there that we are considering here – "How Much Bread Do You Have? or, more precisely, "How Many Loaves Do You Have?" The two feeding stories in Mark have varying details: Jesus feeds 5,000 the first time, 4,000 the second time. Both of these counts, by the way, would have been a "men only" count. Women and children would have added to the count making the miracle all the more impressive.

Jesus uses "five loaves and two fish" the first time, and "seven loaves and a few small fish" the second time. He gathers twelve baskets of leftovers the first time, seven the second time. The fundamental differences in the story are the numbers and there is surely some theological significance – 12 and 7

are important numbers in scripture but no one knows for sure the meanings here.

After both feedings, the meaning gets misunderstood. After the first feeding, Jesus crosses the sea to Bethsaida. After the second, he "immediately" crosses to Dalmanutha. After both feedings, Jesus finds himself embroiled in controversy with the Pharisees – the Jewish law-keepers. After the first feeding, Jesus heals a deaf man with saliva. After the second feeding, Jesus heals a blind man with saliva.

The feeding of the 5,000 is found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and the feeding of the 4,000 is found in Matthew and Mark in our story for today. John's Gospel, the most independent of the four gospels, relates the story only once, with 5,000 as the number. Not surprisingly, Mark gets to it sooner than any of his other gospel counterparts.

Regardless of these interesting - maybe meaningful, maybe not - details, the fact remains that the disciples have been through all this before. You would think that they would know the drill by now. You would think they would know how this story is going to end. You would think that they would know that there is One standing in their midst who is willing and able to make bread appear for the crowds like manna from heaven. You would think they would understand.

But of course, they don't. Instead of handing their bread and fish back to Jesus and asking him to once again provide the daily bread of those who have gathered, they once again stammer their protests and do what they can to send the crowds back home. Jesus, again, will have none of it. Before we badmouth the disciples too much - How many times has God provided for us in the past, and we still have trouble trusting him for whatever we are going through in the present?

Two reasons jump out to me as to why they and we need two stories – a rerun as it were. First, the need to do this in two different geographical locations is important for Mark. Back in Mark 6, Jesus and his disciples were in an area whose inhabitants were primarily Jewish. Those who get to enjoy this unexpected feast there were the children of Israel. In Mark 8, however, Jesus has crossed The Sea of Galilee to a region that was predominantly Gentile.

This is a big deal, especially for those who thought that they had this Jesus all to themselves. By doing a rerun on the other side of the lake, Mark can drive home that such – "he's all ours" - thinking was just not accurate. He shows that contrary to what the disciples, the Pharisees, and even his

readers might think, no one is outside the reaches of God's grace. Jews and Gentiles. Insiders and Outsiders. All are welcome. I don't think it's an accident either that Jesus uses the same formula here and in the other story when he feeds the masses that he does when he gets to the Last Supper. "TOOK bread, BLESSED bread, BROKE bread, GAVE bread." All are welcome when he feeds a multitude – all are welcome around this table.

The second reason for rerunning the story is for Mark to be able to drive home the difference between an attitude of scarcity versus an attitude of abundance.¹ Theologian Richard Mouw once said that one of the most important questions in all of theology is: "Do you have a stingy God or a generous God?"² Mouw's question of a stingy versus a generous God leads us to Jesus' question for us today – "How Much Bread Do You Have?" It's a question that forces the disciples and us to examine how we view our life, our possessions, our relationships. It forces us to ask ourselves about our outlook on life when Jesus asks us how much bread we have.

The disciples were coming at the problem before them from a mindset of scarcity. Scarcity mentality refers to people seeing life as a finite pie, so that if one person takes a big piece, that leaves less for everyone else. Most people have been conditioned to have a scarcity mentality. Short-term thinking and solving problems the way we've always tried to solve them is the norm. A scarcity mentality is what kept the disciples from feeding the crowd and what keeps many of us from achieving our goals. There's not enough. Let's go home.

An abundance mindset refers to the paradigm that, regardless of where we find ourselves, we have plenty. Parker Palmer, a wise Quaker writer, some years ago told a story that has been much on my mind this week as I had this scripture text in front of me. Palmer was a passenger on an airplane that suffered the fate some of us have experienced. The plane pulled away from the gate, taxied to a far corner of the airport, and just stopped. He could hear the engines wind down, and his heart sank. I learned quickly when I traveled for my work that when they shut the engines down, you're going to be there awhile.

The pilot came on the intercom and said, "I have some bad news and some really bad news. The bad news is there's a storm front in the west, Denver is socked in and shut down. We've looked at the alternatives and there are none at the moment and we're going to be here for a while until we get an opening. The really bad news is that there is no food onboard and we'll be here through lunch." Everybody groaned. Some started to complain, some became angry. But then Palmer watched as one of the flight attendants did something remarkable.

The flight attendant stood up and took the intercom and said, "We're sorry folks. We didn't plan it this way and we really can't do much about it. I know for some of you this is a big deal — you are really hungry or you have a medical condition and need to eat something. Some of you might not care one way or another and some of you need to skip lunch. So I'm going to pass around a couple of baskets and ask everybody to put something in the basket. Some of you brought a snack, something to tide you over, some of you have a few LifeSavers or chewing gum or Roloids. And if you don't have anything edible, you have a picture or a bookmark or a business card. Everybody put something in and then we'll reverse the process. We'll pass the baskets around again and everyone can take out what they need."

What happened, Palmer said, was amazing. "The griping stopped. People started to root around in pockets and handbags, some got up and opened their suitcases stored in the overhead luggage racks and got out boxes of candy, a salami, a bottle of wine. People were laughing and talking. This flight attendant had transformed a group of people who were focused on need and deprivation into a community of sharing. A world of scarcity had become a world of abundance."³

The disciples were operating in a mindset of scarcity. Jesus had seen it in them before and he was trying to get them to change. We usually operate in a mindset of scarcity. God has seen it in us and God tries, through the teachings of Jesus, again and again, rerun after rerun, to get us to change.

But how do we change? How do we move from a scarcity to an abundance mindset? Last July, Forbes Magazine – a magazine that would usually be advising on how to get more, how to climb the ladder, how to be a high achiever, gave some interesting advice. They published five ways that could help people move from a mindset of scarcity to one of abundance.⁴ Jesus could have easily given this article to his disciples as they complained about not having enough bread to go around.

1. **FOCUS ON WHAT YOU HAVE.** Instead of looking at the person next door or on TV that you think has more stuff, better stuff, newer stuff, focus on what you have. The answer to "HOW MUCH BREAD DO YOU HAVE?" in a scarcity mindset is always "not enough!" The answer with an abundance mindset is, "I have this half loaf, and this scone and this bagel and this tortilla – they're not all the same and not very pretty but it will feed us very well." (You know that we're not talking about bread anymore, right?)

2. **SURROUND YOURSELF WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE AN ABUNDANCE MINDSET.** You know those people who always seem positive and see the

glass as half-full instead of half-empty? Find them and start spending time with them. Attitudes rub off. They are contagious. The quality of a person's life is most often a direct reflection of the expectations of those with whom they associate. If you fill your echo chamber with people who are mad at the world, you are much more likely to be mad at the world too. "HOW MUCH BREAD DO YOU HAVE?"

3. CREATE WIN-WIN SITUATIONS. A scarcity mindset believes that if one person wins, another loses. Try to create win-win conditions in your life to combat this manner of thinking. Consider practicing this in both your personal and professional life. This means listening without judgment, fully understanding what a win-win means for both of you, and brainstorming solutions until you find one that satisfies both parties. Such ideas seem impossible in today's political climate but we must insist that it is possible. "HOW MUCH BREAD DO YOU HAVE?"

4. INCORPORATE GRATITUDE INTO YOUR DAILY LIFE. It's very difficult to feel fear or sadness while feeling grateful at the same time. In 2007, Robert Emmons, professor of psychology at the University of California, Davis, began researching gratitude and found that expressing gratitude improves mental and physical well-being. Being grateful also impacts the overall experience of happiness, and the effects tend to be long-lasting. "HOW MUCH BREAD DO YOU HAVE?"

5. TRAIN YOUR MIND TO RECOGNIZE POSSIBILITIES. An abundance mindset allows you to see more in your life: more options, more choices, and more resources. One fascinating Harvard study found that when we focus on one particular thing very intently, other possibilities that are right in front of us can go completely unnoticed. If your belief is "I can't do it" or "it's impossible" then any other thoughts contradicting that don't have a chance to take root. Start training your mind to loosen its focus and create an expanded awareness. "HOW MUCH BREAD DO YOU HAVE?"

The gospel story in general and our story today specifically, is one of abundance. The question, "HOW MUCH BREAD DO YOU HAVE?" asserts that our life comes from a generous God who loved the world into being – asserts that our lives begin and end in God, and asserts that this well-being cannot be taken from us. We are made to live in a world of abundance in which we are not worried or anxious or greedy.

When Parker Palmer was getting off the airplane after that flight, he stopped and asked the flight attendant, "Do you know there's a story in the Bible about what you did back there? It's about Jesus feeding a lot of people with

very little food.” “Yes,” she said, “I know that story. That’s why I did what I did.”

Often abundance is confused with having all of our material desires met. Scripture seems to indicate that abundance is not that, but being close to Jesus, giving him what we have, and trusting Him to provide for what we need. Abundance is sufficient, enough. HOW MUCH BREAD DO YOU HAVE? Enough. Enough to feed the plane. Enough to feed the world. Enough to change the world. We need to be reminded again and again of the abundance in Christ that is ours and it’s contagious when we share it with others. It’s a rerun worth watching again and again.

¹ Most people point to the Stephen Covey book “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People” for coining the mindset concepts of scarcity and abundance.

² Found in article “Beyond the Lectionary Text: Mark 8:1-13” by Joel Schreurs at www.ccp.calvinseminary.edu.

³ Parker Palmer story found in sermon by The Very Rev. Samuel T. Lloyd, III titled “From Scarcity to Abundance” preached October 19, 2008, found at www.cathedral.org.

⁴ Found at www.forbes.com in article, “5 Ways to Go from A Scarcity to Abundance Mindset” by Caroline Castrillon, published July 12, 2020.