

Sermon Notes: August 2, 2020 **Focus:** Feeding of the 5000 [Lectionary readings](#)

God blesses us to be an abundant people; yet time and time again it seems so hard for us to practice this abundance. Even worse, we try to stop those we think might be surpassing us. I will share a parable of abundance and an anti-abundance tale. The abundance story comes from India. The anti-abundance tale comes from where the wind comes sweeping down the plain, so we will get in the time machine and go back to Tulsa in 1921.

Feeding of the 5000 – The great anti-imperial miracle. *Miracles are sometimes indictments.* I make this odd claim because we have three mix-and-match choices when it comes to thinking about miracles and healing.

- 1) Biblical people were superstitious. We have thankfully progressed beyond believing in miracles.
- 2) God promises wholeness, so we pray for a personal miracle (often healing from sickness)
- 3) Miracles are anti-imperial acts of God.

I am taking door number 3 because it is the least likely choice we would make. The 5000 is an anti-imperial miracle. Rome is supposed to be the Pax Romana (the great universal blessing). But in reality, Rome tortured and killed its enemies; degraded the poor for a buck; tax-farmed those who could least afford it; and created deprivation just because it helped the richest get more stuff.

Jesus fed the people what they needed + leftovers, unlike Caesar. He taught power, showed power, and shared power. Neither Caesar, nor the Temple, and nor synagogue leaders could deliver as true leaders.

5000 also looks backward and forward Biblically The feeding of the 5000 is the only story that all four gospels include. ([Edward Adams](#) goes into a great deal of textual detail if you want to get lots of cross referenced nerdiness.) This story in particular is the like the spine of history book. It helps us look back to how God sustained the Israelites in the desert. Remember the Old Testament stories with manna in the wilderness? Using manna, God rejects Egypt as the provider/sponsor of the covenant people's destiny. In other words, God feeds the wandering Israelites, not Pharaoh. The 5000 also looks forward to the last supper, where everything was still shared.

The Miracle's Movement: Need, Lack, Blessing, Action, Abundance

Need v 14 *When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.* I believe that Jesus meets our needs – but not in some overly spiritualized way. He is the author of our destiny and at the same time he's in the trenches knowing that we need daily bread.

Lack v 15-17 *It's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food. Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish."* The message is clear that Jesus is acting as the Pater Familias, not Caesar. The Roman system had Caesar as father of all his subjects and each household had a Pater who mirrored this reality in his own home. You know, Pater knows best. Jesus takes a counterintuitive approach of sharing his power with the disciples. They weren't his subjects but his collaborators and friends. That is not a move Caesar would make.

Blessing v 18-19 *"Bring them here to me," he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves.* I know Jesus wants us to be the miracle for each other. The blessing is an invitation not to hoard or hide. The story of the manna in the desert shows that when people did not share, the manna rotted. If we are not generous with our hearts hard wired to shared, it will rot too.

Action v 19-20 *Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied.* When there is failure and lack of abundance, God makes a way. Isaiah 63:5 *I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support; so, my own arm achieved salvation for me.* Isaiah is a picture of God who fills in the gaps when no one else will. The action in the miracle shows the disciples taking tentative steps to be part of God's miracle.

Abundance v 20 *and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.* Abundance is actually hard to practice. There is more than enough, yet we through our own doubt, mismanagement, and greed create misery. Instead of working together, It's every man or woman for themselves.

The Long-Handled Spoon Story: I offer you the long-handled spoon story. I first read it in C.S. Lewis' *Great Divorce* and thought him very clever, but the story has shown up in a variety of forms in almost every spiritual tradition. Here is the Hindu variety:

A religious leader was having a discussion with Shiva one day and said, "Tell me about heaven and hell". Lord Shiva led the man to two doors. Shiva opened one of the doors. In the middle of the room was a large table with a pot of delicious stew. But, in this room the people were starving. They had spoons with very long handles that were strapped to their arms and each found it possible to reach into the pot of stew and take a spoonful. However, the handle was longer than their arms and it was impossible to feed themselves.

Shiva said, "You have seen hell". They went to the next room and opened the door. It was exactly the same as the first one – same pot, table, and spoons, but these people were fat and happy. The

leader was confused. “It is simple,” said Shiva, “It requires but one skill. You see they have learned to feed each other.”

We regularly create hell on earth by not believing that we can lift each other up and flourish.

Tulsa riots (anti-abundance) The heaven room in the long-handled spoon story offers a high level of spiritual collaboration. It taps into our communal nature. The hell room is the worst of us – enter early 20th century Oklahoma. Tulsa in the early nineteen teens was home to the wealthiest black community in the country. Greenwood or Black Wall Street was the premier community until Dick Rowland tripped in an elevator onto a young white woman named Sarah Page. [Tulsa History Museum Page](#)

1908: Miscegenation. Unlawful for a person of African descent to marry any person not of African descent. Penalty: Felony punishable by a fine of up to \$500 and imprisonment from one to five years in the penitentiary. That is one of the tamer Jim Crow laws.

White supremacy and Jim Crow would collide because Black Wall Street was flourishing. Jim Crow insisted on suppressing every aspect of black individuality and dignity. Asking for a receipt on water bill could get you killed, because how dare a black man question the word of a white man – that happened for real. White people were looking for almost any reason to put this Greenwood community in its place. Enter Dick Rowland in 1921 who tripped in an elevator which caused him to touch the arm of Sarah Page. This became to the pretext for a lynch mob, aerial bombing, and an orgy of murder that flattened of Greenwood -- because how dare black people think they didn't have to cringe and shuffle to the supremacy of white people? How dare they flourish?

The point

We are not as bald-faced self-protective as the white people of pre-depression era Tulsa, but we have all sorts of ways that we create barriers to abundance, we don't feed others with long spoons, and we try cozy up to an empire that makes us feel like we deserve everything we get.

The story of the 5000 is that God is our author and provider. God is always setting a very large table for us to feast as equals. The Pax Romana did not do this. The Founding Fathers did not do this. Pharaoh did not do this. Warren Harding, weeks into his presidency while Tulsa burned, did not lift a finger. No principality or power has ever set a better banquet table than God.

The only role we have is to be waiters for the miracles of God and share the bread of heaven that was never ours to begin with. Next week you'll walk on water like Peter.

Todd