

Stewarding Our Ministry

October 13, 2024

John 6:1-12

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ² A large crowd kept following him because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³ Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵ When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹ "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" ¹⁰ Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place, so they sat down, about five thousand in all. ¹¹ Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." ¹³ So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets.

Please pray with me: God be in our heads and in our understanding. God be in our eyes and in our looking. God be in our mouths and in our speaking. God be in our hearts and in our thinking. Amen.

A single raspberry. That was the only thing in young Ilse's basket. And yet, in a place of horror and scarcity, it was a treasure, transformed into a holy offering. It was a gift, never forgotten.

Etched in glass walls of a Holocaust memorial is a quote from Gerda Weissman Klein. It says, "Ilse, a childhood friend of mine, once found a raspberry in the camp and carried it in her pocket all day to present that night to me on a leaf. Imagine a world in which your entire possession is one raspberry, and you give it to your friend."

It was a story Gerda Klein told again and again. Klein spoke of a childhood friend, Ilse, who was sent to the labor camps with her and how her friend died in her arms in a wet meadow on a 300-mile "death march" in the waning days of the war. Of 2,000 female prisoners who began the death march, just 128 survived.

Gerda was just 15 years old when taken and she survived the camps for six years. Her friend died a week to the hour before Gerda was liberated by the American soldier who

later became her husband. After experiencing daily hunger in the camps, she made it her life's work that no child ever experiences hunger like that.

Because Gerda spoke German, she was more valuable to the Nazi's and was not sent to Auschwitz like many of her family members. In a presentation to college students she said, "After 1942, they all (meaning most of her family) went to Auschwitz. But it is not of the unspeakable horrors I want to speak. I will address the ultimate goodness of humanity. You must know of the greatness of humanity that is left to you."¹ Gerda Klein died at the age of 97, in 2022. The motto she shared with her husband is, "pain should not be wasted." Her story of survival was her basket, and a single raspberry was, for her, a symbol of life-sustaining goodness and love.

"Imagine," she said, "A world in which your entire possession is one raspberry, and you give it to your friend."

This is the world Jesus challenges us to imagine. A world where our desire to uplift our neighbor overrides our impulse to keep for ourselves. A world where the beauty of a gift transcends the ugliness of a holocaust. A world where love prevails over hatred, and generosity overwhelms greed. A world where comforting our neighbor becomes our comfort.

At the heart of our gospel story for today is this world, enacted in a shared meal, where one seemingly insignificant offering is multiplied into a life-changing gift of love. How it happens is not nearly as important as trusting that it does. What so easily could have been a story of scarcity is instead a story of abundance.

We are conditioned from an early age to fear not having enough and of not being enough. We are told that life is a zero-sum game – that there must be winners and losers – that for you to have more I must have less. Our economy of consumption keeps us in want, our debt enslaves us, we are forever chasing the next new thing. This culture of scarcity can lead us down a path of greed, selfishness, conflict, depression, and anxiety. There is never enough. We are so accustomed to this culture of scarcity; we can hardly imagine anything different.

It was no different in Jesus' day. And yet, Jesus offers an alternative for us to imagine. He sees this crowd gathered on the hillside and his impulse is to give – to show hospitality. He asks Philip where they can buy bread to feed everyone, and Philip responds out of scarcity. "We don't have enough money." Andrew then says to Jesus

¹ https://www.eneWSCourier.com/news/local_news/holocaust-survivor-seeking-to-abolish-hunger-worldwide/article_81bdf092-23ac-511c-9126-eff60804706c.html

that there is a young boy with five barley loaves and two fish, but he, too, succumbs to scarcity thinking as he says, “But what good will it do when the need is so great.”

We wonder about this young boy. Did he offer his bread and fish? Perhaps this child is not yet tainted by this idea of scarcity. Perhaps, like a single raspberry, he finds delight in giving – he dares to imagine that what he possesses is a treasure to be shared.

We know how the story ends – with enough – and more. And as the crowds sit to eat their fill, we catch a glimpse of the world Jesus challenges us to imagine.

As a church we are challenged to continue this story by giving those trapped in this culture of scarcity a glimpse of the generosity, kindness, and selflessness that make for abundance. We dare to believe that our five loaves and two fish, when seen as gifts to be shared, can feed a multitude.

I want you to open your baskets. In your basket are five loaves and two fish. Instead of lamenting what we lack, I want you to think about seven gifts and assets you have to share and write one on each of your seven pieces of paper. If you are viewing online, just make a list. Find a pen or grab a pencil from the pew. If our ministry is to give people a glimpse of the world Gerda imagined and the world Jesus imagined, what is your offering?

Let’s not let scarcity limit our thinking. What do you have to contribute to this love-sharing, life-giving work? What wonders does God have in mind for your offering?

You can start working on your assignment. If you are struggling to come up with seven things, I am going to offer some suggestions that might help spark your thinking about this...

- Maybe you have a hobby, a special interest or something you do for fun
- Do you have a vehicle, perhaps you can offer a ride to someone
- Everyone has a smile to convey warmth and welcome
- Perhaps your offering is just showing up – being present
- What about prayer, sending cards, making calls, or just listening?
- Do you like opportunities to be creative?
- Are you a leader? Do you have specialized training? Are you technologically savvy?
- An open mind and a desire to grow your faith can be an offering.
- Your relationships and networks of affiliation can create opportunities for partnerships, collaboration, and inviting

- Maybe you have a house and you like to host guests for meals or small groups
- Your life experience can be an offering to share
- What you do for fun or exercise like hiking, pickleball, 5 crowns, yoga, mahjong...
- Your time
- Your resourcefulness or ability to find a bargain
- If you go to the store you can buy tuna for our Friendly Center collection, or school supplies for kids
- Maybe you love books, or music, or movies
- Your yes when asked to serve
- Paying attention and staying informed
- Your money – whether you give in ways large or small – your intentional gift matters and helps to sustain ministry by paying staff, maintaining our campus, and contributing to outreach.

You might look at some of your basket ingredients and wonder how on earth it could contribute to the ministry of the church and our lives – it doesn't matter – God is the master of creativity.

What's important is that you know you have something to share that could make a world of difference to someone else. A gift given with intention to share love and light to your neighbor, or to the world, is a treasure to be shared.

Today as we come up for communion, put your loaves and fish in the basket. Let's imagine a world set free from the fear of scarcity – a world where everyone has enough...and more.

There is also a little wooden fish in your box, that is for you to keep as a reminder of this story...and that stewardship isn't just about giving...it is about the world we are creating together.

Let us do as Jesus instructed – and see what God can do with five loaves and two fish.