

Year B Proper 17 Thinking Abundantly John 6:1-21

A number of years ago, as an eager Lay Reader I approached the priest in charge of my church and talked with him about an idea I had. I envisioned our church offering a once-a-month free Sunday morning breakfast to those in the community who needed not only food in their bellies but companionship in their lives. The priest thought this was a great idea and asked me to present it at the next Parish Council meeting. So, a few days later, on a Tuesday evening, I sat across from the priest at one end of two tables pushed together in the church basement with about 12 other people listening to my idea. I finished talking and there was a couple seconds of silence and then, from the other end of the table, a woman said with obvious skepticism, “You want us to provide a *free* meal?” This woman was a fixture in the church, a strong woman who helped organize and run various fundraisers, a woman who got repairs seen to and yard work done. She was a constant voice of “the ways things were” and “the ways things should be.” Her comment kicked off a discussion of the free breakfast that went on for quite a while. She was in opposition and said a lot of things I have heard now many times over in different churches. It shouldn’t be free – we don’t have much money and we need it for the church. There aren’t many of us able to do these meals. We’re all getting older. And so on. In the end, this woman seemed to reluctantly think we could give the breakfast a try but it certainly wasn’t going to be free. With a glance at me, the priest then said to her, “So will you deal with this?” and the woman said, “Sure, leave it with me.” Well, do you know what happened? Nothing. Nothing happened. There was never any Sunday morning breakfast – free or otherwise. And, because this type of thinking was habitual, the church building’s four grey walls that had witnessed this Parish Council conversation are no longer the walls of a church.

What I experienced at that Parish Council table is a familiar litany intoned at many a Parish Council meeting, and in other circles, and I learned much about the myth of limited resources. Many people often think there is just enough for us. We are worried we’ll run out. We often think like Philip in our Gospel story today – in terms of impossibility. “Feed the crowd? That’s impossible for us. It requires too much that we don’t have.” Or we think like Andrew – in terms of scarcity. “Well,

we do have a little but it's no where near enough so we'd better not even get started. We need to keep it to pay our own bills." Thinking in terms of impossibility and scarcity leads to action – or lack of action – that reflects the thinking of impossibility and scarcity.

Jesus shows us today that this way of thinking and being is not God's way of thinking and being. God's ways are not our ways and God's thoughts are not our thoughts. This isn't news. We know this. But...and this is a big "but", as Christians we have decided that we, clothed in Christ at our baptisms, will align our ways with God's ways and our thoughts with God's thoughts – to abide in Christ as he abides in us.

This means sitting up and taking notice of what Jesus is teaching us today. It is part of our "How to..." guide to being followers of Christ. To abide in Christ as he abides in us is to be transformed into his glory, to become more and more Christ-like. This may seem far-fetched as we sit here feeling all too human but it is exactly what we are told in the Scriptures – the Holy Spirit is drawing us – and all of creation – ever closer to the intended perfection of all things in Christ. This perfection is attained in our complete reconciliation with God. Complete reconciliation happens when God's ways are our ways and when God's thoughts are our thoughts. And so, with the power of the Holy Spirit guiding us, we strive toward this. Jesus has a lot to teach us of his thoughts and actions today – thoughts and actions that we are to make our own.

We are told that Passover is near. That would, of course, have the people thinking of the great Exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. Like Moses, Jesus leads a crowd who follows because they have seen the signs, the miracles, he performed. Like Moses, Jesus goes up a mountain, and like Moses, Jesus teaches the people. Associating Jesus with the great prophet Moses would have been an easy leap for the people. Indeed, they say about Jesus, "This is the great prophet who is to come into the world." Thinking of Jesus as a great prophet means the people knew he was sent by God, was bringing God's message to the world, and – as in the case of Moses – God was personally with him. All of this will sound familiar to us as Christians who have listened to many sermons over the

years...We are sent by God. We bring God's message to the world. We have God personally with us through the Holy Spirit. We – the Church – as Christ's body bring to the world what Jesus did – God's love in the revelation of God's kingdom. As did Jesus so now do we.

Jesus shows us today one of the key pieces to our lives as his body – the knowledge of God's abundance. God thinks abundantly and God acts abundantly. In God's ways and in God's thinking there is no impossibility. There is no scarcity, no fear of "not enough". Like Moses in the wilderness, Jesus sees the thousands gathered around him in the middle of nowhere and feeds them. This is where Jesus goes beyond Moses though. While Moses prayed to God to help him feed the people, Jesus – God made flesh – knows that he will feed the people. Jesus takes the people's knowledge and understanding of the great prophets like Moses and he brings them a step further. He does not turn to God for help. He is God. Just in case we miss the power and authority of God in Jesus as he feeds the multitude, John tells us the story of Jesus walking on water in which Jesus announces himself as God. The disciples see Jesus approaching them, walking on the water, and Jesus says to them, "It is I. Do not be afraid." We lose the full impact of these words in translation. The disciples, John tells us, know it is Jesus coming to them. Jesus doesn't need to tell them "It's me – don't worry." What Jesus proclaims to them is the great "I AM". The same words that Moses hears when he asks the God speaking to him from the burning bush, "What is your name? Who should I tell the people is sending me to them?" and God simply and powerfully replies, "Tell them, 'I AM'."

Jesus proclaims himself to be God and shows us that in God's kingdom everyone is fed. And not just fed – satisfied. Not just satisfied – abundantly satisfied with plenteous leftovers. In this gospel we encounter a God of love and compassion, filling the needs of those who gather to him – the crowd, the disciples, us. This is the perfection to which we are being drawn... complete reconciliation with a God who thinks and acts abundantly calling us to do the same so that our ways are God's ways and our thoughts are God's thoughts. We are children of God, living in God's kingdom and revealing this kingdom to others. Truly thinking abundantly and acting abundantly as life in God's kingdom is meant to be is tough for people

immersed in the ways of the world. When the crowd in the gospel realized the enormity of the sign Jesus had done for them, they wanted to make him an earthly king, ruling them in an earthly way.

Jesus shows us we must unhook our thoughts from the world's ways. We receive the gift of abundant life in God's kingdom with the expectation that we go into the world with this gift. Being participants with God in fulfilling his purpose seems an enormous task, an impossible task...the world is so far from perfection, so many people do not love others. But we abide in Christ as Christ abides in us. As Paul says, it is no longer I who lives but Christ who lives in me. Christ working through us, through millions of us, will achieve God's purpose. Psalm 145: 16 says of God, "You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing." We are now God's hands.

When Jesus saw the crowd gathering he said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip did not pass the test but together we can, we must, pass the test. Let go of "impossibility." Let go of fear. Embrace the abundance of God and God's kingdom. "He himself knew what he was going to do." Let us trust that and gather up the leftovers.