

Text: Luke 9:7-20  
Date: 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2022  
Place: MUC  
Theme: Meals as Enacted Hope

## Introduction

Thursday morning, 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2022. 4.35 am at my desk seeking to write my reflection for today. I woke up around 2.30 am lying in the bed re-reading Chapter 3, of 'A Meal with Jesus' – Meals as Enacted Hope.

After re-reading the chapter I got up and went to the kitchen. Washed the pots and wok, plates and bowls, and started making soup for Thursday's study group.

As I washed, I was reflecting on the chapter I had just read. Sharing food... Preparing Meals... and Leftovers. And I also read Luke 9:7-20 – the gospel reading for today – Story of the Feeding of 5,000.

Aside from the resurrection, the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels. Luke's account is the shortest and neatest of the four. Obviously, the Gospel writers considered this a significant miracle. It appears that Luke intentionally framed the feeding of 5000 to address the question of Jesus's identity.

*<sup>7</sup> Now Herod the ruler<sup>[a]</sup> heard about all that had taken place, and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, <sup>8</sup> by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the ancient prophets had arisen. <sup>9</sup> Herod said, "John I beheaded; but who is this about whom I hear such things?" And he tried to see him.*

The author of the Gospel Luke tells us that Herod was perplexed. Herod was wondering who is this person that he heard so much?

And in verses 18 to 20 Luke did the same.

*<sup>18</sup> Once when Jesus<sup>[c]</sup> was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” <sup>19</sup> They answered, “John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen.” <sup>20</sup> Then he said to them, “**But who do you say that I am?**” Peter answered, “The Messiah of God.” When the crowds find Jesus, Luke tells us that “Jesus welcomed them” (v. 11).*

‘Welcoming’ is the action of a host, receiving his/her guests. We know Luke has a special interest in hospitality and includes Jesus’ teaching on being a host (14.12- 14). In offering an indiscriminate welcome, Jesus exemplifies what he teaches.

Jesus preaches to the multitude *about the kin-dom of God* (v. 11). This is the main theme of Jesus’ public preaching in the Synoptics, though only Luke mentions it in this context. According to Tim Chester *“The Christian community is the beginning and sign of God’s coming world—and no more so than when we eat together. Our meals are a foretaste of the future messianic banquet. Our meals reveal the identity of Jesus. Our meals are a proclamation and demonstration of God’s good news.”* (p. 61)

And I believe our meals are truly a proclamation and demonstration of God’s good news when God’s people embrace a theology of abundance, a theology of enough and a theology of leftovers

### **We Need a Theology of ABUNDANCE**

In the story of the feeding of 5000, we must not forget that the number of people present is clearly a conservative estimate. We often forget that during this time, women and children were not very well accounted for or included in government

bodies. The myth of scarcity tells the powerful to accumulate and take and dominate, to be driven by the fear of Not Enough and Never Enough. We make our decisions out of fear and anxiety that there isn't enough for us. These core beliefs can lead us to the treacheries of war and hunger, injustice and inequality. We must keep others down so we can stay on top. We stockpile money and food and comforts at the expense of one another and our own souls.

In our world today, it is easy to become accustomed to the dominant narratives of consumerism and individualism that pervade our personal, professional, and even spiritual lives. The temptation to gather resources and keep them for oneself is strong, sometimes overpowering. Yet time and time again in the Bible, God demonstrates unending generosity and shares the abundance of Her creation with humankind.

In miracles and parables, Jesus taught his disciples about a new way to live together, caring for our one human family without any fear of scarcity. Believing in a theology of abundance is a new way to live in the world. It is a direct contradiction to the individualism, consumerism, and unbridled capitalism that dominate our world today. Moreover, it is an active choice, and one that may require sacrifices. It requires us taking a critical look at where resources are hoarded and kept from people at the margins of society.

### **We Need a Theology of ENOUGH**

*<sup>12</sup> The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside to lodge and get provisions, for we are here in a deserted place."*

<sup>13</sup> *But he said to them, “You give them something to eat.” They said, “**We have no more than five loaves and two fish**—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.”*

In the Kin-dom of God there is more than enough. It’s an act of faith to live with the narrative of abundance instead of the fear of scarcity. As the Church, we are called to exist in a prophetic community, an alternative to the narratives of the world living out the Kin-dom of God in our right-now lives. There isn’t scarcity, not really: there is more than enough if we live like our Jesus. There is more than enough for us all, there is room for us all. In a theology of scarcity, we believe there will not be enough for everyone, and doubt that God will provide for us. The scarcity mentality can plunge us into toxic suspicion and bitter competition.

There is a biblical example of God’s sufficiency in Exodus. God provided daily for the people wandering in the desert, sending manna to eat. The catch was that the manna would spoil after a day, so they could not store it and thus relied on God every day. In Exodus 16:16-18, God instructs the people to measure the manna with a device called an *Omer* (with a volume of about two quarts) for each person, so that there would be enough for each person. *“...When they measured it with an Omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed (16:18).”*

What if we strived for **enough** rather than the excess of capturing abundance? Having an enough mindset can lead us to live more simply, to experience more contentment, to live with greater gratitude and generosity, to re-calibrate our lives to what God desires, and to use our resources for God’s purposes, and by extension, the common good.

## ***We Need a Theology of LEFTOVERS***

We live in a culture where wasting food is normal, and comments about starving children are trite. And so, when we mention “leftovers” we are likely to get a wide range of opinions, some of them quite strong. Some may insist that no leftover is a good thing. I would offer that some things even taste *better* when they are leftovers, as the flavours have truly had the chance to come together. Consider a good batch of chili or slow simmered sauce. Or, my favourite “leftover” to enjoy: curries of all sorts. According to Chester we need a theology of leftovers.

There are many stories of God leaving God’s people with a lot of leftovers. These stories build upon the idea of God providing for us in a dramatic, exponential way. This is not just manna in the wilderness, enough sustenance for one day at a time; these are miracles of abundance. In the account of the feeding of the 5000 all four accounts state that after everyone had eaten, the disciples collected twelve baskets of leftovers.

Only Matthew and Mark tell us about the other miraculous feeding of four thousand, where they collected seven baskets of leftovers. John alone goes further. He tells us that Jesus expressly instructed the disciples to collect the leftovers and told them why – “Gather up the fragments left over, that nothing may be lost” (Jn 6:12). Jesus takes the leftovers that we spurn or reject, like the gift of the loaves and fish, and turns them into a feast... and more! Jesus assembles with the leftovers of society and makes of them his Church... and more. What about the leftovers of our society? The food wasted by supermarkets whilst the homeless grow hungry; unoccupied houses whilst asylum seekers have their claims rejected.

In Jesus' ministry, the corners of society from which we often avert our gaze become the centerpiece. Let's remember the Jesus' simple gesture of giving thanks and distributing the five loaves and two fishes is the presence of God's abundant, overflowing love with and for us, especially those most vulnerable among us. The presence of leftovers is a promise that God isn't done with us yet. There will be food and nourishment for another day. In fact, knowing they are there, we might even look forward to it. Leftovers, in a theological sense, build our anticipation of a continued relationship with God. Such stories remind us of the overwhelming generosity of God.

Stories like the feeding of 5000 or 4000 encourage us to remember that even as we marvel in God's goodness and blessings, they are only a small glimpse of what God is capable of. God is always much bigger than our experiences, even our imaginations and dare I say our theologies.

### **Meals as enacted hope.**

I believe we enact hope when we practice *the theology of abundance, the theology of enough and the theology of Leftovers*. This morning as we share in the bread and wine that Jesus offers let's commit ourselves to live the theology of abundance, the theology of enough and the theology of leftovers so that we can share the abundance we receive from God.