

MORE THAN ENOUGH



Scripture:

2nd Corinthians 4:13-5:1

¹³But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—"I believed, and so I spoke"—we also believe, and so we speak, ¹⁴because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. ¹⁶So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

^{5:1}For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Luke 9:10-17

¹⁰On their return the apostles told Jesus all they had done. He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida. ¹¹When the crowds found out about it, they followed him; and he welcomed them, and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed to be cured.

¹²The 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." ¹³But 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." ¹⁴For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, "Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each." ¹⁵They did so and made them all sit down. ¹⁶And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. ¹⁷And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



It has been more than nine months since I last preached here at Church of the Roses. Wow, has my life changed in the last nine months. About this time last year, Liz and I were talking about the plans we had for 2018.

One of my key construction employees, TJ, who had worked for me for over ten years, had gotten his contractor's license and he was planning on starting his own construction business by the end of summer 2017. TJ has been a key employee for many years, especially since I started working full time at Westminster Woods Camp as their executive director over five years ago. His abilities to help me

run my construction company enabled me to cut back to fifteen to twenty hours a week working on my construction business. But with TJ's leaving and the fact that I was tired of working sixty plus hours a week, I thought that 2018 would be a good year to wind down my business.

My initial plan to ease out of my business was to have my crew finish up a few promised construction projects I had told clients I would do. And as I worked with my employees to find them new jobs, I would have them help me do some minor remodeling of our house. I designed and built our house twenty-eight years ago and some

things in the house were showing some wear. Our kitchen cabinets and countertops were a bit tired, our carpeting was due for replacing; the interior on the house needed to be painted and a new roof and rain gutters were only a few years off.

So I had the perfect strategy to end thirty-two years of self-employment. Finish what I had promised and use my own house as fill in work until my crew had found new construction jobs; brilliant idea, or so I thought.

THEN THE OCTOBER FIRES

And then the October fires came, and life was turned upside down. Not only did Liz and I lose our house in the fire, but thirteen of my former construction clients, who also lost their homes that I had built or remodeled, called me within days of the fire to see if I could help them in the rebuilding of their homes. So much for winding down my construction business! Not only had Liz and I lost our house but I lost most of my construction tools in the fire as well, tools I had spent the last forty years accumulating. We escaped the fire with my work van, Liz's car, my computer, some important papers and the clothes we were wearing.

John Lennon in his song "Imagine" has the lyric, "Imagine no possessions, it isn't hard to do." There was no imagining on our part; Liz and I were homeless and almost possession-less.

I share that story not to gain your sympathy, for as painful as that time is, it is also an incredibly freeing experience. It really puts life in perspective.

When we fled our house at two in the morning we came to the church. At that time of the morning we didn't know of any shelters that were open yet. So we came here to our second home, and I had a key so I could let myself in. Ray Alden and his daughter were not far behind Liz and me. As I drove past the Lucky's parking lot there were dozens of cars and people milling about in the parking lot. It wasn't long after I arrived that I went across the street and invited anyone who wanted to come over to the church. I explained we had bathrooms, water, couches to sleep on and Wi-Fi.

Bowen Hall quickly became a place of refuge. And it continued to be so for many days. So many of the people who found refuge here were not members of our church; they had no previous connection with us. They simply needed a place to go.

FEEDING THE FIVE-THOUSAND

We meet up with Jesus this week in our scripture reading from Luke, the story of the feeding of the five-thousand. This is one of the few stories in the New Testament that appears in all four of the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

One of the reasons I found myself drawn to the Luke passage is that his and Mark's versions are the only ones where Jesus tells his disciples to break the group of five-thousand into smaller groups of fifty. I think that is a critical part of the story, but I want to come back to that.

I have read the story of the feeding of the five-thousand many, many times. I first remember the story being told to me as a young child. In my childhood memory of the story Jesus miraculously, singlehandedly, turns the five loaves of bread and two fish into thousands of fish and loaves.

And yet as we read in the story, that is not what happened. "And taking the five loaves and two fish, Jesus looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces."

SMALLER GROUPS

There was more than enough!

**How did that happen?
I think that part of the key to this story is
the fact that Jesus broke the crowd
into groups of fifty or so.
Just think about a time when you
were in a huge group of people.
The only people you know are
those you came with,
perhaps your family or a few friends.
If you are like me you get overwhelmed
in huge crowds, especially
in a group of strangers.
But when that giant group is broken
down into a smaller more manageable
size, people get to know one another.**

That is the genius of the smaller groups.

My guess is that in those groups of fifty or so, there were probably many families that were

combined into one group to share the meal; the kids in one family made friends with the other families' kids, the parents found commonalities as well. People who traveled alone to hear Jesus were included as part of the group. And everyone who was there came to hear Jesus and they wanted to talk about Jesus and what he had just spoken to them about.

JUST IN CASE

In those smaller groups there were no doubt some who had brought food. If those mothers were anything like my mom they didn't travel anywhere without some food. You know, as my mom use to say, "Just in case." My mother was always prepared; her purse was as large as a small suitcase. She packed so much stuff in the purse that she was encouraged to go on the TV show "Let's make a Deal," and sure enough she was selected to go on the show.

Like my mom, my guess is that many of those people gathered who came to hear Jesus speak probably had more than enough to feed their families. By breaking them into the smaller groups the moms felt more comfortable sharing it with everyone in their group.

And that is exactly what we did as a church during the fires. We couldn't take in everyone in Santa Rosa who needed refuge, but we extended a helping hand to those who needed it.

A REFUGE

I remember one of the groups that came into the church that night was three couples from Arizona. These young couples were spending their last night of vacation in Glen Ellen at a Bed and Breakfast. The fire was threatening Glen Ellen and they had to flee their Air B&B in the middle of the night. All six of them squeezed into their small rental car and somehow they ended up in the Lucky's parking lot across the street. When I first invited them to come over to the church they were a bit apprehensive, but after the second invitation, they came over. They spent most of the day with us on Monday, joined us in our meals and were so thankful when they left for the San Francisco airport in the late afternoon. We won't ever see them again, and yet they won't ever forget us.

It is in those moments of pain and grief and uncertainty that Jesus shines the brightest in this world. When we are willing to forget about our predicament and focus on the community we find ourselves in, we are at our best as people. Jesus set the example; we just have to remember the lessons he has taught us.

Our reading from 2nd Corinthians 5:1 says, "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

LIFE IS NOT THE SAME

Tents were destroyed, houses were burned, lives were dramatically altered. Whether you lost your home or not, your life is not the same as a result of the fire. But in spite of our losses, we have more than enough.

Our pastor Cindy Alloway has invited those of us who lost our homes in the fire to meet with one another. We have come together a number of times to share our stories, our losses, our pain, our recovery. I have found great strength in these gatherings. I have been amazed at not only Cindy's care of us but all of you that have supported us and the many others during this challenging time. We have received so much from all of you; thank you.

THE FIVE GIFTS

In her book "*The Five Gifts*," Dr Laurie Nadel writes about discovering hope, healing and strength when disaster strikes. Dr Nadel lost her home in hurricane Sandy and offers some powerful advice on how to rebuild your life after major trauma. And her advice is not just for people who lose their homes in disasters, but for anyone who has suffered a major loss of any kind in their life, the loss of a loved one, the loss of one's health or a family member's health, losing a job or having to alter your lifestyle in some unplanned and unpredicted way. These are situations that we don't choose for ourselves, but are rather thrust upon us in our life. There are times when we question whether we have enough to get through the trauma we are facing or not.

Dr Nadel writes, “After a violent or unexpected event, nothing returns to where it was before. Like it or not, we are forced to change. Some of us don’t like that very much – so much that just thinking about it is frightening, although the fear of change is often more painful than the change itself.”

Dr Nadel goes on to say, “In less extraordinary times, it’s easy to hold onto the illusion that we can control change. Nothing stays the same, no matter how hard we try to cling to the status quo as we remember it.”
The psychiatrist and author, Dr Alex Patakos, said it another way,
“You can change without growing, but you cannot grow without changing.”

WILLING TO SHARE

In the story of the feeding of the five-thousand, Jesus in his blessing of the food and his prayer to God, challenges those gathered to reach into their hearts and put their trust and faith in God. Jesus simply prayed, and by so doing encouraged everyone gathered to be part of the miracle. It was in the collective sharing that brought about the miracle. There was more than enough.

In the same way Jesus reminds us all that we have more than enough when we are willing to share not only our food and possessions, but when we share our lives with one another. When we are willing to take the risk, and open our doors, our hearts and our minds to things we are not expecting and are not ready for. We have all experienced some sort of loss in our lives.

Some of that loss has no doubt been tragic and probably unexpected. We need to be willing to share our stories of recovery. Because it is when we share our life stories, that those who hear our stories gain great insight into how they can not only survive life’s tragedies, but thrive in them.

HOUSE BUILDING IN TIJUANA

For many years Church of the Roses went to Tijuana, Mexico to build houses for some of the needy people of Mexico. We built very small, very basic houses for the Mexican families. Our church groups built the house alongside the family that was going to live there, and it was a great experience, not only for the Mexicans who would live in the house, but for those of us who went and worked on building the house.

The building was hard physical labor; it was dirty work, exhausting work. And yet when we returned to the primitive campsite we called home each night, there was a sense of community and closeness that I have only experienced on those mission trips.

We took almost nothing with us on the trips; we camped in tents on a very barren piece of land. Our showers at night were cold and from a bucket of water. But the eleven to thirty of us that went on those trips each year accomplished a miracle each time we went. We built a house for people who needed it desperately, but equally important we built a community like no other. We shared all that we had and did; we all shared in the cooking of the meals and reveled in our dinner conversations. We shared our stories around the camp fire each night. We didn’t have much but we had more than enough. We didn’t live from a sense of scarcity, but rather a sense of abundance.

Those were life changing trips, not only for the Mexican family, but for all who participated; we came back each year transformed people.

SHARING WHAT WE HAVE

But you know, we all have more than enough when we put our trust and faith in God, not in worldly things.

We all have more than enough when we follow the lead of Jesus and find ourselves at our best when we live in community together, sharing what we have, and giving what we no longer need to those who need it.

We all have more than enough when we let the Holy Spirit work through us by reaching out and inviting those that we don’t know to join in our community.

Even in life’s greatest loss and tragedy we have more than enough; we need to remind ourselves to share it with one another and all of God’s people.

Amen



Commissioned Elder Chris Rhodes
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405