

Rev. Mike Cole
Providence Presbyterian Church
Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 2, 2026
Psalm 17:1-7, 15; Matthew 14:13-21

"More Than Enough"

This week I'm taking a vacation to the Telluride Jazz Festival. Summertime makes me think of family vacations, particularly family camping trips. Without a doubt, some of my family's most memorable vacations have been simple camping trips when we pitched a tent and spent two or three weeks enjoying the vastness and diversity of God's creation. We almost always gravitated to the mountains of Wyoming or Colorado, in part because that is where my father spent several years as a cowboy in the mid 1920's.

When I was a boy my father used to take me into the back country of Wyoming, showing me where they grazed herds of cattle and where the best natural springs were. Dad taught me that one of the most important things about camping was selecting the right campsite - which meant one that was as far away from other people as possible. Upon arriving in a campground, we would drive around surveying various sites, looking for one that was the most isolated and remote.

I remember one time in particular when we had driven all day to arrive at our desired location long after dark. Dad assured us that we were in the right spot and that it had the two primary qualities he looked for - it was remote and isolated. You can imagine our surprise when we awoke in the morning to discover that we had missed the campground by several miles and had pitched our tent in the middle of a cow pasture and were completely surrounded by a herd of cattle.

Dad was a salesman by profession and I suppose that dealing with people day in and day out made him want to get away from people. Jesus was also always surrounded by people. People were always pressing in on him, asking, demanding, questioning, criticizing. Thus, it's understandable that from time-to-time Jesus would want to get away from it all and find some place that was remote and isolated.

That's how Matthew introduces today's lesson - "Now when Jesus heard this (that John the Baptist had been beheaded), he withdrew from there in a boat to a lonely place apart. Jesus was saddened by the death of his cousin, the man who had baptized him, and needed a place to re-group.

We can identify with that. I know that I can. Whenever I suffer a loss or some kind of defeat, I immediately look for an isolated and remote spot to which I can retreat to gather my thoughts and regain some energy and momentum.

So, Jesus and his disciples headed off for a “lonely place,” only to discover that while they were sailing there, throngs of people from nearby towns traveling there on foot had beat them there. Can you imagine the frustration that Jesus must have felt?

I remember another camping trip that Ellie, Colin and I took when we lived in California. I had spent weeks researching campgrounds in Southern California and had uncovered what I thought would be a remote isolated little campground that hardly anyone knew about. Well, first of all there is nothing in Southern California that is isolated. Second of all, there is nothing in Southern California that is a secret. So, you can guess the rest of the story. We arrived at the campground to discover that not only was it a popular site, it was hugely popular with massive crowds of bikers and jet skiers, who partied all night long. Yes, it was a memorable trip. And I was very frustrated with having my plans for a week of solitude destroyed by these inconsiderate people who just wanted to have fun.

But that’s not how Jesus reacted at all. When he saw all the people following him, he had compassion. He immediately began to heal them. He didn’t say, “Boys, let’s pack up the tent and keep going until we get to where they are not.” He began to heal the hurting people.

In fact, so intent was Jesus in his healing that, like many preachers, he lost track of the time. His disciples reminded him that it had become quite late and they were a long way from food. The disciples then said something which revealed their prescription for dealing with the people’s great hunger: “Send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” Send them back to town where they can buy something to eat. Send them anywhere but here. Send them to anyone but us. Master, send them away.

Then Jesus answered, “You give them something to eat.” Despite the disciples’ protest that their resources were meager (only five loaves of bread and two fish), Jesus took what they had, blessed it, offered it and it was enough. In fact, it was more than enough to satisfy more than five thousand people.

Although we cannot know from the written text what tone of voice Jesus used in his response to the disciples, or what word he emphasized, in my head I imagine that he emphasized the “you,” as in “**YOU** give them something to eat.” And we, along with those first disciples protest, “We have nothing here. We just can’t. We’ve only got 52 members. That’s it. That’s all. We’re not a mega church with thousands of members and a budget of millions. We can’t possibly tackle all the needs of the world.”

And Jesus commands us, “Bring what you have to me.” Then, taking what we have, he blesses, offers it, and wonder of wonders, it is enough - no not just enough, it is more than enough.

You see, Jesus uses who we are and what we have to accomplish things we can only imagine. In the last year we grew our congregation by more than 10%. When I ask those joining our congregation why they came back after their first visit, do you know what they said? It wasn’t the great building. It wasn’t our many mission projects. It wasn’t even my spectacular sermons. All of our new members said it was the warmth, hospitality and inclusiveness of our congregation that drew them back after their first visit.

Not to toot our own horn, but God has brought together a very special group of folks who genuinely care about everyone who steps across our threshold. God is up to something quite remarkable here and is drawing to us all sorts of folks who are seeking a vibrantly safe place to grow their faith and serve those in need. In essence we are the bread and fish Jesus has to work with and it is more than enough.

There is a subtle movement here in this story, a movement that you and I need to follow closely because it implicates us. Jesus’ seemingly harsh demand is, in reality, a great vote of confidence in you and me. Go ahead. You give them something to eat. I promise you; I will bless it and it will be more than enough. Just do it.

And we do it with our mission giving to Parker Task Force, Team Zimbabwe, One Great Hour of Sharing, World Communion offering and the Christmas Joy offering. And whatever we give, it is enough.

There’s one other thing to notice in this miracle of feeding. Look carefully at verse nineteen and you will find a familiar pattern: he took the bread and fish, looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke and gave it to them. Where else do we find that sequence of action except at the last supper where he also took bread, gave thanks, broke and gave it saying, “this is my body broken for you?”

Receiving the bread, then or now, is a sign of our relationship with Christ. As we gather at the Lord’s table this morning, we don’t come alone, or as family groups, or even just as a congregation. We share in communion with Abraham and Sarah, the five thousand who dined on loaves and fish, the disciples in the upper room, the apostle Paul, the saints and martyrs, John Calvin, John Knox, and family and friends who live eternally with God. When we eat the bread and drink the cup, we are reminded that God’s providence to all generations has always been more than enough!

We are companions - a word which literally means “with bread” - on our way to His kingdom where he promises to take what we offer, bless it and declare it more than enough.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Charge: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen