

Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. 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?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" 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. 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. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

I recently read someone quoting Parker Palmer's exegesis of the Feeding of the 5000. They didn't realize that he was quoting early 20th century liberal biblical interpretation. At that time, about 100 years ago, there was tremendous disbelief in miracles and a desire to rationalize the bible so they and Parker Palmer concluded that the miracle at the feeding of the 5000 was that Jesus got everyone to share. Now that would be remarkable but it has nothing to do with the point of the gospel. The feeding of the 5000 is not to be explained away. To do so is to empty it of all meaning.

Abundance is a theme in John's Gospel. At the Wedding in Cana of Galilee he is hospitable. Jesus changes the water into wine; more than anyone can drink is produced. He is the gracious host even when being the host is expensive, six month's wages to feed 5,000 and when he has nothing to host people with. He is hospitable.

We are in a recession. Some signs say that we are coming out of it but it will be a long time before things are back to where they were a few years ago. Giving is down whether to this church, Homes with Hope/IHA, or other nonprofits and religious organizations. But this is not a sermon about donating money.

This is a sermon about daring to be hospitable even in times of scarcity. Walter Brueggemann, my favorite theologian, writes frequently about the contrast between the biblical theology of abundance and the economic theology of scarcity. Brueggemann asserts-correctly I believe-that there is always enough. Faith and the necessities of life are not zero sum games. There will be more than sufficient whether we're talking about faith, food or housing.

Jesus feeds the people not because they clamored for it, but simply because they exist. This is congruent with the way John presents Jesus. Throughout the 4th Gospel Jesus is always the initiator. He only acts from his own vision and here he is showing what it means to exercise hospitality simply because people are. He sees the problem, points it out to Phillip who says that they can't afford it and to Andrew who scouts for resources and comes up short. He is

undeterred by their rational conclusions. He makes an abundance out of almost nothing. That is the miracle. The miracle is not that everyone shared. The miracle is that from obvious scarcity more than enough came into being when Jesus blessed what was observably insufficient. Jesus was hospitable in the face of reason. He was abundantly hospitable.

The people do not know what to do with this radical hospitality and they say: "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."

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The people are looking for magic food and Jesus is giving them a lesson in hospitality. He isn't interested in ending world hunger through miracles—he's interested in the world having confidence in abundance. He demonstrates that we are to care for each other simply because we exist.

Throughout the Gospels whenever the people clamor for Jesus to be King what they're really saying is that we want him to protect us from suffering and want. Jesus always denies their request to anoint him because the only way to understand him as King is through the crucifixion and resurrection.

Yesterday, after five years of work, we dedicated the Westport Rotary Centennial House. On August 1 six tenants will move in. They are homeless and mentally ill and they will succeed in this housing. We are working hard now to have one of those tenants be a woman you see walking around Westport daily. We think we've convinced her to move out of her campsite and into an apartment.

We could've opened this building in 2005 if we hadn't lost two years struggling with neighbors who were convinced that this building would destroy their neighborhood. They were fearful because they have a theology of scarcity. They believe that there is not enough to go around and if anything strange happens in my neighborhood then I need to fight it. I am pleased to report that today many of them are pleased with the building and they see it as an asset to the neighborhood.

However, as many of you may not realize, a woman who grew up in this church, Barbara Anne DeGruchy, died in June. She drowned in the Saugatuck. She would've been eligible for the Westport Rotary Centennial House or other supportive housing but because we spent so much time in P&Z hearings the housing was not finished in time for her. We are about life and death decisions and Barbara Anne died.

In September we will go before P&Z to ask for a 60 year lease for 655 Post Road, E., across the street from Mitchells, the site of the Linxweiler House and we hope soon to be the site of the Linxweiler Supportive Housing Project. We need 60 years because potential funders for supportive housing want to be certain that if they build it then it will continue to serve as supportive housing.

I sought to build supportive housing on this site in 1997 so I know it is controversial. The P&Z hearing where we were denied permission to go ahead is the nadir of my nearly 22 years at HwH.

We are now in ten buildings in Westport. No one's property values have been adversely affected by our presence. No one's child has been threatened by our presence. However, one of the neighbors of the Linxweiler House has told me that she will fight us tooth and nail because this is an inappropriate site for supportive housing and we will destroy her neighborhood and threaten the wellbeing of her child.

She firmly believes that there are not enough resources available for us and her to exist on the same site. She believes in the economics of scarcity and not the theology of abundance.

I took her on a tour of our programs and she said that they are all excellent, but none of them belonged near her home. She was willing to tolerate the current use of the house (which we have used continuously since 1982 long before she arrived in Westport) but she would not tolerate a change in use, especially an intensive change in use, that would bring the formerly homeless mentally ill to her neighborhood.

That is a theology of scarcity. I sought clergy help with this issue and called her clergyman. She is not a member of Christ & Holy Trinity but will otherwise be anonymous. I didn't reach him so I left him a detailed message about the issue. That was more than a month ago. I've called him back and he still hasn't called me. I can only assume that he sees this as my issue and not his. He has an angry member who would not appreciate his telling her that her faith expects her to be hospitable even to the formerly homeless mentally ill. This is of course projection on my part. He may simply be having an extraordinarily busy summer and hasn't had the chance to get back to me.

As I see it we are given many chances to be like Jesus and simply be hospitable because it is the right thing to do. We can do this because the gospels teach us a theology of abundance. There is enough for you and for me.

There is a finite amount of real estate in Westport. There is an even more finite amount of real estate in Westport where we have a reasonable chance of building supportive housing. It is scarce. But there is an infinite possibility of showing compassion to the most vulnerable members of our community. We can be hospitable to the poor, the mentally ill and the homeless.

The miracle that we are praying for is that enough people, especially those on the P&Z, will see this as a way to take from the abundance of our community and use it to improve the quality of life for vulnerable members of our society. Drownings of vulnerable people are rare in Westport but many die young from other causes. In supportive housing they don't die. They flourish.

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I've been doing this work for a long time and will continue for seven more months. In that time I've seen what is observably insufficient become abundant and I know that what HwH has done has been blessed. I hope that Jesus has one more miracle in him for my tenure so that we can get this project through P&Z and provide hospitality to the most vulnerable members of our community.