Just a week ago I was bemoaning the fact
that some Sundays I just can’t get
the quantities for Eucharist right .
(Do you have that problem Barry? Judy?)

I had way too much wine left over last week.
I comfort myself with the belief that
rather than this being wasteful
one should **always** have more than you need,
because it is a sign of God’s generosity.

A friend of mine tells a story from her early ordained ministry. She – like me – is not particularly gifted in the maths department. Every week that she was presiding at Eucharist,
she seemed to have either way too much or way too little.
Try as she might, she just couldn’t seem to get
the quantities right.
While it’s easy enough to go wrong with the wine,
it didn’t seem possible that she could be
consistently wrong with the breads.

Finally, out of desperation, she asked the sidesperson –
whose responsibility it was to count the number of people
present at worship and advise the priest–
what method she used for counting.

The response: “Oh, I don’t **count** the congregation,
I just ask God for a number!”

In this morning’s Gospel, God gave a pretty big number!
Five thousand men, plus an unspecified number
of women and children.

I take some comfort in the knowledge that even for Jesus
the quantities were out.

Jesus has just received news that his cousin, John,
the one who baptized him in the Jordan
had been beheaded by Herod.

Unsurprisingly, he withdraws to a deserted place.
But his solitude is short lived.

The Disciples – ever practical –
suggest the that perhaps now is the time for the crowd
to pop off home for their dinner.

Jesus – as always – sees things differently.

This story appears in all four gospels.
Mark and Matthew have a 4,000 feeding story as well.

Six versions.
It is clearly an important miracle story.

There was a trend in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for theologians and preachers
to offer rational explanations for miracle stories.
The timing of this trend is perhaps unsurprising,
given the rise of scientific enquiry.

Of all the miracle stories, the feeding of the 5,000
was one of the easiest with which to take this approach.
“Commentators suggested that Jesus’ action of
sharing what he had prompted others
to bring forth what they had imagined keeping for themselves.”

David Lose says this, “Maybe. Maybe not.
Though prompting that kind of generosity might be its own kind of miracle! But maybe the “miracle” isn’t really the point.”

He goes on to home in on the difference in perspective
between Jesus and his disciples.

Earlier I noted that the disciples were being practical.
A huge crowd and dinner time with nothing to hand.
Their practicality comes from their perspective.

The disciples are viewing the situation via the lens of scarcity. They see only the lack.

And isn’t that sometimes the case for us too?
That our perspective is shaped by what is missing.
And in certain seasons of our life this might be very appropriate, because are grieving loss or tending hurt.
But sometimes, if we’re not careful,
circumstances beyond and within our control
can lead us to look at all of life
from a place of scarcity. We see the hole rather than the donut.

So what was happening for Jesus?
It would be easy to think that Jesus
(knowing what he knew) saw an opportunity
to show just what he was capable of.
That a feeding miracle might be just the crowd pleasing
kind of thing that would reinforce his message.

But we are told at the very beginning of this story, that Jesus, having taken himself off to a lonely place to grieve the death of John, was motivated by compassion for the crowd.

Ego was not his starting place. Nor the desire to perform.

But compassion.

And because of that, and because of “his trust in God,
Jesus saw possibilities where the disciples only saw limitations.

And isn’t that sometimes the case for us too?
That faced with a difficulty, we can see the possibilities?

Look at the relative speed with which
we adapted to online worship;
not something any of us would have chosen prior to lockdown.

Sometimes it is compassion or love that enables us
to see beneath destructive behaviours in one we love.
Or perhaps it’s the profound by simple trust that God is faithful
and that this too will pass.

Maybe its gratitude that we have enough.

In this story, Jesus’ compassion and his trust in God
brought forth a whole lot of possibilities.

But notice that he didn’t turn away to perform
a magic trick in secret.
(“Ta-dah!” Here’s something I prepared earlier!)

Rather, he involved both the disciples
and the crowd in the miracle.
Possibility came from problem.

Abundance came from scarcity.

Jennifer Whipple draws our attention
to the link between what happened in this gathering
and what happens each week when we gather.

She writes,
“In each account of the feeding of the 5000 there is a moment that points to and reminds us of the Last Supper,
of coming to the communion table with one another.
Each in their own ways, the gospel writers explain
that Jesus took the bread,
and gave thanks and blessed it and broke it.
He then handed it to his disciples to distribute to the crowds.
The crowds all ate until they were **satisfied**,
and there were even some fragments left over...
enough to fill a basket for each disciple to carry.[[1]](#footnote-1)

There is something delightful about the fact that there’s a full basket left over for each of those scarcity-loving disciples!

If you were a stranger, coming to church for the first time,
and observing Eucharist, it would be easy to view it from a scarcity perspective. It’s a cracker and a sip of wine.

Yet how much did we miss sharing the bread and wine
during Lockdown?

Because of our faith, and because of the echoes of this meal throughout our lives

our perspective on Eucharist is one of possibility, and abundance.

We find that this tiny symbol is enough for us to be satisfied. Eucharist contains the world within it.
It is comfort and challenge. It is gratitude and peace.
It is hope and healing.

How might we allow God to take this perspective
and let it inform all of life?

How might God change our fretting into gratitude
and our scarcity into abundance?

Perhaps this story is a reminder that
“God promises to take what we offer with thanksgiving
and use it, stretch it, even multiply it to make sure it’s enough. Enough for us, enough for those around us.”

And when that happens there will always be some left over.

When bakeries re-opened in Level 3, I found that one of the things I had been missing was donuts. I’m quite fond a donut, I must confess.

In fact, I might have just got into a rather bad habit, mid afternoon of sampling a bakery’s donuts – purely for research you understand.

Anyhoo, I’m not a big fan of lots of cream. Or chocolate. My favourite kind of donut is one of these.

Let me tell you it has taken a prodigious amount of will power for this to have arrived thus far uneaten.

What do you see?

Interesting.

But didn’t any of you see what’s missing?

It’s a hole with some dough around the edge of it.

1. Jennifer Whipple [↑](#footnote-ref-1)