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Barbara Ewy

Abundance out of Scarcity

 The story of the feeding of the five thousand is found in all four of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Although each tells the story from their own perspective, they agree on many of the important details. It was a deserted place, and late in the day. A crowd had followed Jesus and the disciples to this place. Jesus had been teaching about the kingdom and healing the sick. The crowd included about five thousand men; Matthew says there were also women and children present, not included in that number. In all four accounts the problem arises of feeding such a large crowd. The disciples are perplexed. It is a deserted place and the people are hungry. The disciples want to send the people away so that they can find food for themselves. But Jesus has a different idea. Matthew, Mark and Luke report that Jesus says, “You give them something to eat.’

 I especially like the way John tells the story. Jesus asks Philip, “Where are we to buy food for these people to eat?” Philip replies, “Six months wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.”

 Andrew adds, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?”

 We know what happens. Jesus takes the loaves and fish, blesses and breaks them. The people sit and are fed, five thousand of them. And there are twelve baskets of leftovers.

 Sometimes we are like the disciples, like Philip and Andrew. We see a problem or issue but we cannot see a solution. Our resources and abilities seem inadequate. We are too poor or too small or too old or too young, or have too little. We lack the ability. The task is too big for us. We do not see a way out.

 But the boy had five loaves and two fish. Jesus took those loaves and fish and fed a large crowd of people. I like this story because it tells me that we are never too old or too young, too poor or too inadequate. Jesus can take what we offer, whatever we have, whoever we are, no matter how small or inadequate it seems to us. Jesus can take whatever we give and do great things with it. Like the mustard seed, or here in California I think of the sequoia seed, so small, so tiny, and yet it grows so large, so tall, so big. In God’s kingdom, even the little that we offer can be used by God to do great things, to bring abundance out of our scarcity.