

God's Blessings of Abundance

2 Kings 4:42-44

We have been following the Gospel of John for the last several weeks and listening to Jesus talk about and share the metaphor of bread for our life in the spirit. Today, we look at the Hebrew Testament and consider another story of abundant bread from the time of the prophet Elisha.

Let us pray together, e pule kākō-u: “Beloved God who brings us this day our daily bread, be with us today as we consider your prophets sharing the abundant bread of heaven. Amen.”

Today's lesson reminds us that the stories of bread and feeding crowds with abundant left overs are not new or unique to Jesus, but in fact have been told throughout the history of our scriptures. In our passage today, the prophet Elisha receives some bread as a gift, and then he feeds everyone, with leftovers!

The fourth chapter of 2 Kings is a series of miracles performed by the prophet Elisha. First Elisha helps a widow who has nothing except a jar of oil. Elisha blesses it, and it provides never-ending oil. Next, Elisha raises from the dead the only son of woman. Then, Elisha purifies a pot of poisonous stew, making it healthy and ono. And finally, as the chapter closes, we have our story of Elisha receiving a small offering of bread and grain, and then using it to feed 100 men. In these stories, the miracles demonstrate that Elisha was a prophet and a man of God. You also need to know that at the time there was a famine in the land, and everyone was hungry.

Out of all of the Hebrew Testament prophets, Elisha is most like Jesus. He cared for the common people. He tended to widows and orphans. He cared deeply about the poor. And you may remember that Elisha was the prophet that asked God for a double portion of blessing and grace, and then Elisha spent his ministry sharing his double portion with his people.

So with this background, we have a man bringing Elisha an offering. It is a small present, 20 small buns or loaves and some grain. Now Elisha was hungry, and he could have taken the bread and eaten it himself, but he didn't—he shared. Notice that the passage says these were of the man's offering of first fruits, which means it was an offering to Elisha for his priestly duties. Jews were required to bring these first fruit offerings to support their priests. Instead of keeping the offering for its intended purpose, Elisha shares it by having the man place it before all the people, all 100 of them. And everybody ate, and there were leftovers.

Based on the stories we have heard from the Gospels about feeding and leftovers, what do you think about **this** story? After hearing Jesus' story of leftovers, what are we to learn and understand from **this** story of leftovers?

To begin, Elisha selflessly shares this bread with everyone. Feeding miracles, including Jesus feeding the 5000 and the manna story from last week, are all stories about sharing **in community**. When we share with one another, there is a spiritual multiplication of what we have. When we share after worship in our meal every Sunday, even when it looks like there certainly will not be enough, when we return after worship, the table is filled with more than we need. There are always leftovers here. Is this a miracle? Of course it is. No one is planning or coordinating

or saying how much of what to bring. But the table fills, and there is enough for all to eat, and there are always leftovers. Leftovers of God's abundance.

As we share our weekly meal, there is also the miracle of diversity. We bring one dish, maybe a loaf of bread, and we get to share an abundant meal of balanced and healthy foods. We bring one thing, but we eat many things; there is always lots of healthy food. We bring a dish, and it becomes a meal for all. Think about this for a moment. Isn't that really an everyday miracle?

But we also share more than just a physical meal. There is fellowship. And laughter. And, of course, sharing the coconut wireless. All of these things blossom from simple offerings that are shared together. Moses and Elisha and Jesus lived feeding miracles. But don't we do the same thing every week?

The final words of our passage today are, "according to the word of the Lord." What does the word of the Lord tell **us**, here at Waiola today? What is God saying to us now, in this place?

God's word is expressed in the people God brings to this place. God speaks to us not only in the written Word of God, but also through the Word of God that is nature, the Word of God that is in the Christ-spirit, and the Word of God in the people sitting right here in the pews with us. As a community of Christ, we are the Word of God in this little corner of God's garden. God speaks to us in our visitors, and in the children who come for Sunday School. God speaks to us in our kokua and hana together, as we work and help one another. And yes, God speaks to us in our leadership and in every friend and member who contributes good will and peace to our congregation. As members of the United Church of Christ, we say that God is still speaking to us and revealing new light and learning and abundance to us. This means we constantly look for new and creative ways to be God's word and hand and feet in the world, and we search for local ways to bring the Gospel of abundance into our lives. We are the word of God alive in this place. Consider how **your** voice might be added to ours as we seek our still speaking God. Consider becoming a deacon or trustee.

Another place to look for how God speaks to us is in our history and mission statement. Let's open our Orders of Worship on the front inside cover and read our mission statement aloud together. Read to one another like Elisha sharing his 20 biscuits when he fed as many as are here now right now. And let us always look for the leftovers, which remind us of God's gift of unending abundance.

Let us read our mission statement together: *"Waiola Church affirms as its mission to establish a foundation for shaping and enriching the spiritual experiences of its members/people and the community of faith committed to Jesus Christ and his work in the world, a faith that is expressed through the host culture, the Hawaiian culture. It seeks a dynamic partnership in the diversity of age, traditions, beliefs, and cultures in creating an environment that preserves the traditions of the church while accepting a path that is open to change, that nurtures the young to the mission of this church, that embraces all into the 'ohana of aloha and Christian spirituality."*

May God be with us in the eternal banquet as we share our loaves with one another, and may the leftovers of God's abundant grace be always and everywhere with us. May God always bless Waiola Church. Amen.