

“Do We Have Enough?”
Matthew 14:13-21
10th Sunday after Pentecost

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Westminster, Greenville
Ben Dorr

Have you ever heard the poem that Kurt Vonnegut published about his friend and fellow writer, Joseph Heller, the author of *Catch 22*?

True story, Word of Honor:
Joseph Heller, an important and funny writer
now dead,
and I were at a party given by a billionaire
on Shelter Island.
I said, “Joe, how does it make you feel
to know that our host only yesterday
may have made more money
than your novel ‘Catch-22’
has earned in its entire history?”
And Joe said, “I’ve got something he can never have.”
And I said, “What on earth could that be, Joe?”
And Joe said, “The knowledge that I’ve got enough.”¹

Enough...have you ever thought about how much that one little word governs the way we think,
the way we respond,
the way we imagine our lives,
even the way we live out our faith?

This past spring and summer, our family started the process of touring colleges. Colleges and universities, of course, have different

¹ This poem can be found on many sites on the Internet, including [Kurt Vonnegut on the Secret of Happiness: An Homage to Joseph Heller’s Wisdom – The Marginalian](#). It was first published in *The New Yorker* in 2005.

ways of handling their tours, but on almost every single tour, a representative from the Admissions Office talks about financial aid.

They talk about the kind of merit-based scholarships they offer, they talk about need-based grants...and they make it all sound like, if your child attends that college, they will make it work.

I suspect that the majority of the parents sitting in on each one of those tours is quietly asking themselves:

Really? Will I really have enough?

Enough is like this invisible FORCE in our lives.
For better or worse, it governs so much of what we worry about.

Do I have enough time to volunteer in this way?
Do I have enough energy to make it to worship today?
Will I have enough money when I retire?
Did I set a good enough example for my children when they were growing up?

When I get to the end of my life, will I have made enough of a difference...with my family, in my community, in this world?

In our text from Matthew, **enough** is exactly what the disciples do not have. Or at least, it's what they THINK they don't have. When the disciples ask Jesus to dismiss the crowds, Jesus tells the disciples, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."

The disciples reply: "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish."

C'mon, Jesus!
We don't have enough.

And then Jesus asks the disciples to bring him the loaves and the fish. And he takes the food and he blesses the food and he breaks the bread and suddenly:

“...all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over...twelve baskets full.”

How did Jesus turn what was NOT ENOUGH into MORE THAN ENOUGH?

I can't answer that question.

But what I can tell you is that the topic of “enough” is on the mind of many churches these days.

Last week, we talked about the growing trend in our country of people who are leaving church, not returning to church, or not showing up at church in the first place. In other words, something like 12% of Americans, people who used to go to church, are now saying to themselves...I've got enough going on in my life, I don't need the church.

In a recent article in *The Atlantic*, Jake Meador writes that this is “the largest concentrated change in church attendance in American history.”

What has caused the shift?

Meador argues that the answer isn't that complicated.

“Contemporary America simply isn’t set up to promote mutuality, care, or common life. Rather, it is designed to maximize individual accomplishment as defined by professional and financial success.”

“The underlying challenge for many is that their lives are stretched like a rubber band about to snap—and church attendance ends up feeling like an item on a checklist that’s already too long.”

And yet, Meador makes a compelling argument for the Church:

The Church in its original conception was intended to be a “community marked by sincere love, sharing what they have from each according to their ability and to each according to their need, eating together regularly, generously serving neighbors...

“A healthy church,” he argues, “can be a safety net in the harsh American economy by offering...material assistance in times of need...

“Perhaps more important, it reminds people that their identity is not in their job or how much money they make; they are children of God, loved and protected and infinitely valuable.”²

All of which got me thinking about OUR identity here at Westminster.

We are, in many ways, an anomaly.

Unlike so many of our sister churches, we are not facing the question of “Do we have enough new members joining?” or “Do we have enough Millennials coming through our doors?”

² Jake Meador, “The Misunderstood Reason Millions of Americans Stopped Going to Church,” *The Atlantic*, July 29, 2023.

We're a church that had over 140 children attending Vacation Bible School two weeks ago.

Can I get an "Amen" to that?

We're a church that had over 60 senior highs attending their annual week at Montreat two weeks ago.

Can I get an "Amen" to that?

We're a growing, thriving church of Open Minds Open Hearts.

And yet, if there's anything I hope you receive from Westminster, it's not so much the satisfaction of knowing that you belong to a "successful" church or a "healthy" church or a "growing" church.

It's the knowledge and confidence that you belong to God.

That you are a cherished and treasured CHILD OF GOD, infinitely valuable, no matter what you may be going through right now.

That this is your truest and deepest identity.

So...on this Sunday before a new school year begins, I've got two questions:

How many of you believe that that is your true identity?

That you are a beloved, cherished, treasured child of God?

Good, good.

SECOND question:

How can you show everyone you encounter today, or this coming week, that this is their identity as well?

In other words, with the people you live with, and the people you work with, and the people you come to church with, and the people you see in your neighborhood, and the people God wants you to get to know

who live in a different neighborhood...how can you and I show each of them that they are a treasured and cherished child of God?

A while back, I read about a bus driver in Chicago.

One day years ago, her bus was filled at mid-day with people rushing to their next important appointment, but at one stop it was boarded by an elderly white woman who wasn't sure how to use her transit card.

She inserted it upside down, then backwards.

While the other passengers became increasingly distressed by the delay, the DRIVER, a very pleasant African-American woman, patiently explained how to use the card.

“Here, honey, let me do it for you,”

The woman finally walked toward a seat, but then turned back.

“Are you sure it took only one fare from my card?”

“I heard it beep twice.”

“Yes I’m sure,” the driver answered.

“But I heard it beep twice—it took two fares.”

“No, honey, it only took one fare—it always beeps twice.”

“How do you know?” the woman demanded.

“Here, let me show you.

Come up here and look at the indicator.

There it is—your one fare.”

By this time, the stoplight had cycled from red to green twice.

Finally, they were underway.

At the NEXT stop, a man in a motorized chair pulled the cord. He was frail, and one could see the tubes from the oxygen tank that was helping him breathe.

“I’m on the way to the V.A. hospital and I’m going to need some help,” he announced.

Again, the driver responded graciously.
 She helped him negotiate his motorized chair to the door,
 told him how to position the chair for the mechanical lift,
 asked him to adjust the position an inch or two,
 and then activated the lift.

The process took a LONG time.
 (Just like the telling of this story is taking a LONG TIME.)

You could sense the tension and impatience of the people on the bus.

The stoplight cycled a few more times and motorists honked.

The driver—unfazed—remained infinitely patient.
 And she got everyone to where they needed to go.³

Now I don’t know if I would have had that kind of patience.
 How many of you feel like you’re an infinitely patient person?
 Right.

And how many of you feel like, when it comes to patience, you usually don’t have...enough?

³ “City Scene: Riding a Chicago Bus Can Have It’s Grace Filled Moments,” by John M. Buchanan, in *The Christian Century*, May 15, 2007.

But I wonder what would happen— if the next time you come across a fellow child of God, and you feel like you have a very thin amount of patience with that person...

What would happen if you went to Jesus, and you handed your patience over to Jesus...and said Jesus, I need you to do something with this...I need you to multiple it, I need you to make it enough...

Jacqueline Lapsley is the new President of Union Theological Seminary in Virginia.

She tells of a time, a few years ago, when she was worshiping at a small, Presbyterian church in southern Indiana. This church had a group of older ladies called the Mission Singers.

There were about 5 or 6 in the group of singers.
And they would sing in worship each week with the pastor.

On the particular Sunday that Dr. Lapsley visited, at the start of the service, the leader of the Mission Singers made an announcement to the congregation. She said that they, the Mission Singers, had not really had time to rehearse that morning...and without directly saying it, she implied that the reason they had not been able to rehearse was because some members of the group had straggled in late that day.

Some of her fellow singers had not been responsible enough, and they hadn't given the group enough time to rehearse.

So the leader of the Mission Singers wasn't in a good mood.
Everyone could see it.

But the leader of the Mission Singers wasn't about to give up on the song that they planned to sing. She said that on this particular Sunday, they would need the congregation's help.

Now the song that they were going to sing was "Stand Up for Jesus."

So handouts with the words to the song were circulated among the pews. But then, when the time came in worship, and the Mission Singers went up on the chancel with the pastor to lead the congregation in song—it became very clear that no one else in the congregation had any intention of joining in.

No one was looking at the handout with the words.
Everyone stayed in their seat, no one stood up to sing.

And the leader of the Mission Singers saw what was happening, and she was already in a sour mood, and now she was truly not pleased!

So she fixed an intense stare at the congregation...and she said:
"No one sits down for 'Stand Up for Jesus'!"⁴

Now what do you think that congregation did at that moment?
They all stood up!

And they sang—whether they had a good singing voice, or a voice (like mine) that consistently sings off-key, that tiny congregation sang with all their heart.

They gave what they had to Jesus.

⁴ As told by the Rev. Dr. Jaqueline Lapsley, in her sermon, "Playing Favorites," preached at Duke University Chapel, June 24, 2018.

In today's text, the disciples tell Jesus:
 "We don't have enough."

And what does Jesus say?
 He doesn't say, oh, you foolish disciples, how wrong you are.

Jesus says:
 Give me what you have.

That's it.
 Give me what you have.

And what happens next?
 You know what happens next.
 A miracle happens next.
 Not just the miracle of multiplying the loaves.

There's another miracle in this text:
 Everyone was treated with dignity and grace and enough to eat.
 In other words, all those strangers, over 5,000 people, were treated
 like cherished children of God.

That, I think, was the job that Jesus was giving to his disciples.
 Friends, our job at Westminster is no different.

As summer comes to an end, and a new school year gets underway,
 how can you and I show everyone we encounter that they are a child of
 God, God's priceless treasure, that THIS is their true identity?

Let me suggest we do what the first disciples did.
 Let me suggest that we give what we have to Jesus.

Whatever love you've been shown,

whatever money you've earned,
whatever hope you possess,
whatever time you've been given,
whatever gifts God has granted you...

give them to Jesus.

You may not think your gift will make much difference.

But that's not what our text tells us.

According to our text,
what you turn over to Jesus—
Jesus will turn into a miracle.

Amen.