

Pentecost 10, Year B
July 29, 2018
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Restoration Hardware had a unique help wanted sign. It said:

“We’re looking for people who don’t know what can’t be done.”

Sometimes I think that Jesus operates out of a similar perspective. Often we, being practical people who want to get things done, forget when we are operating in the Presence of the Holy that the usual limitations might not apply. The real challenge then comes in remembering that we are always in the Presence of the Holy. So our cultural bent toward ‘being realistic’ takes on a whole new meaning. The task at hand may indeed be too great a thing for us, if we were attempting it on our own, or even as a group. But it may be well within the range of possibilities when we include God in the equation.

There is no better way to learn this lesson than to experience having the boundaries of our usual assumptions stretched beyond our wildest imagination. In the Gospel reading for today we learn that Jesus’ ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing had resulted in a vast, persistent crowd of followers. That sounds wonderful. Who wants to argue with success? The problem came in dealing with the logistics

needed for a large crowd. Jesus and the disciples were faced with a significant group of hungry people. They had climbed up a mountain and had a good view of just how many folks there were, when Jesus turned to Philip and asked him where they were going to buy bread for them. Philip did some quick math and realized that they did not have the funds to feed everyone—and that’s assuming they could easily go get that much bread from a nearby town. Just then Andrew approached Jesus and said, **“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?”** I smile that it is a child who offered what he had. When that boy left home he was well equipped to take care of himself. Five loaves and two fish are a fine meal, maybe even a meal and a snack, for one boy. But he was able to see beyond himself and share. He, like those sought in the Restoration Hardware sign, had responded out of what *was* possible, and that was to give what he had. In any realistic assessment of the resources at hand, it didn’t seem like much, which Andrew noted. But I also note that Andrew accepted the gift from the boy and brought it Jesus, leaving open the possibility that something could happen from there.

Jesus told the disciples to have the crowd of five thousand people sit down. Then, like we will do in a few minutes as we turn our attention

to the altar, Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke the bread, and gave it to the people. He did the same with the fish. By the grace of God, the five barley loaves and two fish that were given as a humble offering became more than enough for five thousand people.

I am not going to explain how that happened, because I do not know how it is that miracles happen—only that they do. I know that God can and does take what we have to offer, blesses it, and transforms it to create abundance. Not only can God use what we have and multiply it to be more than enough, both for us and for others, God can also bless *us* to be a blessing to others. As surely as the bread and wine in the Holy Eucharist start off as ordinary bread and wine, and are transformed so that they are filled with the Presence of God, we too are transformed and filled with the Presence of God. There is no limit to how many people can be fed and transformed through the Holy Eucharist. Nor is there any limit to how many times or in how many ways each one of us can be filled and transformed. So when what we offer is *ourselves*, the possibilities for transformation are endless.

The limits we observe are usually on our part, in how we do the math, how we limit our imaginations, how we hold back. Paul said to the Ephesians, **“Now to him who by the power at work within us is able**

to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory....” reminding us that we don’t know what can and cannot be done when God is at work within us. And we won’t know what God might accomplish through us until we offer both what we have and who we are.

Amen