

# LIVING HOPE - "FOOD FOR ALL"

## Ordinary Time

Mark 6:31-44

A Sermon Preached by Pastor Peter Ilgenfritz  
University Congregational United Church of Christ  
Seattle, Washington 98125  
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Scripture:

### Mark 6:31-44<sup>1</sup>

Jesus said to his apostle, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in a boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As Jesus went ashore he saw a great crowd and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place and the hour is now very late send them away so that they may go into the villages and buy something for themselves to eat." But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat." And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." When they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled; and they took up 12 baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

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### Pastor Peter Ilgenfritz

During the summer we have been considering hope: where is it; what is it; how do you find it; what does it feel like to live in it; and what does it feel like when the it's nowhere to be found and we need to find it again – which is just what this morning's sermon is all about, which is just what the Scripture engages with us today: The question before us: How you find hope when you got nothing left to give. I mean when you're worn out, when you're tired out, when there's nothing around, where, then, is the hope?

### PRAYER

Gracious God,  
Here we are today, your people gathered.  
Here we are as we come and you know how we are  
– full of full hearts and thanksgivings and lives;  
And also, yes, sometimes worn out and tired out.

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<sup>1</sup> The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). 1989.

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God find us what we are and where we are today  
– And give us some living food, we do pray. – Amen.

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So where are we? Where are we in the story? Where are you in the story today?

Well, where they are in the story today is that Jesus has just sent out his 12 friends, his 12 disciples. He sent them out with, well, out without a lot to go with. He sent them out with empty bags, no food, just some sandals on their feet. He sent them out to go heal. He sent them out and they healed. But they didn't heal in easy places.

He sent them out to go heal and do God's work of justice in hard places, places where Jesus knew that they wouldn't so easily be accepted, places that he knew that they would be kicked out. Where we are in the story is those disciples have come home again. And if you're like them – and sometimes we are – we've been doing a lot of running out and around ourselves, without a lot in our bags, with long to-do lists, sometimes feeling like the wrong people were sent out to do this work. And all we see before us is this endless work of justice and more justice that needs to be done. And we're tired out. And sometimes perhaps it's you today in your story and in mine that we know that kind of exhaustion.

Where are we in the story? They just got home, and they just get word that John has been killed – Jesus's cousin and beloved friend. We know what that's like perhaps, too, as well the exhaustion that is grief, the exhaustion of that kind of grief when you find out that unexpected news, picking up the phone, that a beloved friend has died. And it's like the floor just falls on underneath you. And perhaps you know that kind of exhaustion as well; perhaps you do today.

And in such a time in such a place in that story at least, Jesus looks with compassion on his friends and says, "*You* all need a break! *You all* need of break! We are *exhausted* people! We are exhausted people running around doing far too much, seeing works of justice tumble before us, seeing endless more work to do." Jesus looks out in compassion on us and says, "Grieving people you need a break!" We never know how important we are to each other until one of us dies, right? And then don't we ... broken hearted people, worn out people ... you need a break.

And in the story Jesus says to his friends, "Let's take a break. Let's get in the boat and let's go around to the other side of the lake, where we'll have some time to rest." And you know how it is when you make such good plans as that, right? There's all these other people watching, and they're saying, "They're going over there. We know another way to get there." And they scurry around, not just one or two but *\*thousands\** more with *\*all\** of their needs, with *\*all\** of their hopes, with *\*all\** of their desires to meet them as their little boats come ashore.

You know how that is when you're worn out, when you're tired out and there's *one* more person in your life. There's *one* more responsibility to pick up. There's *one* more set of diapers to be changed. *One* more thing to do.

Boy! And there's Jesus again! There's Jesus again doing what? Just pouring out compassion – one more time.

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You know how it is. You know how it is when you run dry, when you're tired out, when you've given all you can. And those disciples, now, they're bone weary – maybe as weary as you and I are – some of us – today.

And the disciples look around, and they say, "It's getting dark and there's nothing here to eat." In other words, the grocery store – Safeway – is way over on the other side of the lake and there's nothing here.

– Which is truly an amazing thing! And I just want to pause and recognize these disciples at this point, that they recognize how it is and what's going on. One of the hardest things for us to do in our exhaustion is even to be *\*awake\** to know that we are exhausted and worn out and tired out, right? But the disciples get that!

"It's late, there's no food, and what are we going to do, Jesus? What are we going to do?"

And perhaps, like us, what they do, as well in such times, is they push back against everything and everybody else. Do you know that kind of exhaustion? Do you know what that feels like? Just get out of here! I am so tired just give me some space. And the disciples stated, "Jesus, we need some room just send them home, so they can get something to eat; get out of here."

You know what that's like and I know what that's like. That's a terrible place to be in. And we keep getting back to that place of utter exhaustion: just give me some room. Give me some space. Give me some time.

And Jesus looks at them with compassion. And says you've got it. *\*You've\** got it. *You've* got what it takes. *\*You\** feed them!" Huh. Well, those disciples said, "Jesus, you're crazy! You're crazy! You're saying *\*we\** got it. *\*We\** got *nothing!* Jesus, we got nothing." The only thing they got – and perhaps you know what this is like, too, in their exhaustion – is they see a problem to be solved, and they say, "The only way we could solve this problem is if we had money and if we had Safeway. Then we could buy a bunch of sandwiches and feed all these people. But we don't got money and we don't got Safeway. So what the heck are we going to do, Jesus? *We've got nothing!*" Perhaps you know what that's like," as well.

We just fall back on our small ways of, like, "I've got nothing – except the bigger problem there is nothing here."

Jesus looks on them with compassion, again, and says, "What do you got? I mean, *you*. I mean really. What do you have?"

"Huh. Jesus, I got nothing. I got nothing. Huh."

Perhaps all I have is my despair that there *is* nothing. Perhaps, Jesus, all I got is my lostness, that there never will be anything. Perhaps all I got is my awareness that there is not enough food in my pockets. Perhaps all I've got, Jesus, is that there's not enough hope here."

Jesus says, "Give me what you got."

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"Well, Jesus, you can't mean you want *that*! You don't really want *that*, do you? You want something *real*. You want something tangible. You want something to feed people."

Now Jesus just says to us – can't you hear him – Jesus is just saying to us, to you and to me, "Just give me what you got. Don't look at it don't judge it. Don't say it's not worth anything. Don't just problem solve it away. Just give me what you've got."

So the disciples, they fish around. And they say, "Well, Jesus what we found is five loaves of bread and two fish. 5000 people. You asked what we've got, that's what we've got five loaves of bread and two fish. ... We're not even sure what we got. It doesn't seem to amount to much. We got this paltry stuff, Jesus. Here."

The biggest thing they do is they say, "Here."

Our problem – my problem – your problem perhaps as well – is when even I look in my pockets to try to figure out what I got, I sometimes can pull it out. Well, all I got is this paltry amount of nothing. But the biggest clue that the disciples give you and me and us is to look within, ask, "What do we got?" And then give it away. Give it to God. That's what they do. That's all they do.

"This is all I got," and they give it to God."

What the heck does that mean? I imagine that it might mean that they give it to a larger imagination than mine. In my imagination five loaves of bread and two fish don't feed 5000 people. Give that to the imagination of God – I don't know what's going to happen.

Despair. We don't talk much about despair. And we don't talk often enough about despair. But despair is saying whatever I got is beyond the imagination of God. Whatever I got is beyond the imagination of God.

Hope! Hope says whatever I got in the hands of God, heck, maybe anything can happen. Maybe anything can happen.

When Yayoi was 10 years old, she had hallucinations.

I don't know if any of you have ever had hallucinations, but I imagine hallucinations could be a kind of scary thing. It's like seeing that something is real and it's there, but it's really not real. And people around you say, well, you might be crazy because you're seeing things that aren't really real. What Yayoi saw was polka dots. She was 10 years old and she saw the whole world was polka dots. She didn't take this as a bad gift or a gift that said she was crazy or a gift that she should hide, but she took it as a gift and said, "Perhaps this is a gift of God. Perhaps that's what I got." And for the last 78 years since she was 10 years old she's just been just sharing polka dots. It's all she was given. It's all she got.

The lines are overwhelming to get into the Seattle Art Museum to see Yayoi Kusama. Have any of you seen her? If you haven't seen her, I really hope and pray that before September 10 you find a way to stand in line and get a ticket and go to see Yayoi Kusama and see what happens when all you have is just a polka dot. She takes a polka dot – just a simple polka dot – and she sees in it everything.

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She sees the point of the story today, the point of the Scripture. And if I could have an experience for us right now, I would put us in Yayoi Kusama's "Infinity Room." Where we would all stand there together and we would see polka dots going out forever into the future.

Yayoi Kusama sees what Jesus sees, sees what God sees when we *\*dare\** to give to God the tiny things – the things we can't imagine are good for anything – and we put them into the hands of God. And in the hands of God they become an "Infinity Room."

I wonder if the Church at its best is an "Infinity Room"? But that's really what we're doing here. All we do is turn around and look at each other and we ask each other, "What you got?" "What do you got?" And we pull out the few scraps of things we have. And, perhaps, over time and with a little more trust in a little bit more daring, we pull out the things that we, well, that we don't quite know what to do with.

"Well, here's my loneliness. What are you going to do with that?"

"Here's my frustration. What are you going to do that?"

"Here's my anger. Do you really want that??"

"Here's my not knowing if there's anything. . . ."

And we offer those things out, not only to each other, but into the holding of God, and we see what just might happen.

When I left the "Infinity Room," I came out of that room laughing. Laughing and laughing and laughing – and saying to the people in the long line, "It's worth the wait. You *\*have\** to see what happens to the polka dots.

That day in that story ended with tumultuous laughter. All they had was seven loaves ... no ... five loaves, two fish: seven paltry objects. It became everything. 5000 people are fed. 12 baskets full of bread left over and fish more to be spared – snacks on the way home.

But it all begins, friends, with this: When you got nothing to give pull out what you've got; Don't judge it; just share it. Give it into the imagination of God and open yourself to the possibility of what might just happen.

—Amen

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