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Loaves & Fishes #foodwasteweekend (Sermon)

Scripture: Matthew 14:13-21 Song: Loaves & Fishes [free sheet music online] Sermon: Rev. Dr. Lauren Speeth, Burlingame UMC 9/8/17.

The reason that we chose the scripture that we did and that particular song (which is a song that comes out of a little kids' program that we're working on) is because it's #foodwasteweekend.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you Lord, our rock and our redeemer. So, #foodwasteweekend! It's a beautiful way to join hands with our neighbors across the country of many walks of faith, and yes even atheists and agnostics, all of us who stand as one, seeking first God's kingdom, by whatever name they know it. And so, that's my topic this evening. So, the loaves and fishes song obviously fits in there, and we wrote it for kids as you can tell and it's part this free little app called Pastor Fish. When children hear the fish tell the story we have the pastor, who is a fish (I wish you could have seen Pastor Jeff's shirt, it had fish on it. It was hilarious). The pastor gets confused about Jesus serving up five loaves and two fishes. But there's nothing confusing about that story itself unless we make it so. It's a story about blessing. And, it's so beautiful, I never tire of listening to it.

When I was learning about ministry, you know, I was taught to ask a question that informed my actions. And it's not "what would Jesus do?" like on the jewelry. Instead, the question is "what did Jesus do?" Because asking what He DID do, instead of imagining what he would do, keeps us from guessing wrong, from being limited by what we can imagine. You know, if we were fish swimming in purple-tinted waters, everything we imagined would be purple, and we'd hardly notice. Jesus transcended, and transcends, the waters we swim in, so it's good to look to what He did do, and not what we conjure up. And yes, there's usually a parallel we can find, if we look deeply and with teachable eyes.

Now, in our reading, from the Gospel of Matthew (14:13-21), even after Our Lord tried to slip away by boat to a remote location, the people had simply gone around the lake to him. He saw their need for healing and He had pity on them. It grew late, and the disciples, not imagining that there could be an abundance, asked him to dismiss the crowd so they could go eat. Jesus' response? You feed them, yourselves. It wasn't much, but when brought before Jesus and it was blessed, it was enough. What began as five loaves and two fishes fed 5,000 men plus all of the women (probably more than 5,000) and then all those kids. The disciples must have been over the moon, delighted. Sitting there, stuffed, they could hardly expect what was asked of them next.

Jesus told the disciples to collect what remained. Imagine that! What were they to think about that? God makes it rain abundance, and he cares about the table scraps? Now, some people talk about how there were 12 baskets left and it was for the 12 disciples that didn't believe, it's for their show-and-tell there later at Capernaum. But I like to think about this undeniable example of supernatural, overflowing abundance, and Jesus still cared about waste. Caring about food waste. Jesus taught them – teaches us

– by that action, that nothing should be wasted. Waste not. Isn't that beautiful?



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If we were to follow this action, much of the 2.9 trillion tons of food that gets wasted every year would make it to the mouths of the hungry. Those 800 million who suffer from hunger daily – those 21,000 who die daily (one every four seconds) might not die. Did you know that it's been shown that there's more than enough healthy food to feed everyone... but we throw enough food out daily, here in the

USA, to fill the Rose Bowl? That the average family wastes 1,000 pounds of food a year? I didn't either, until I got involved with ampleharvest.org's food waste weekend project as a member of the 2017 Steering Committee. I'm glad I did, you know, because it got me thinking. It got me thinking about how food waste intersects with the climate crisis (if you believe there's anything going on with our climate... just, if you do...) With better food husbandry, fuel and water could be saved. Same for tractor fuel, jars and cans, plastic bags. Oh, and all that irrigation? Listen to this one: National Geographic says the energy alone that goes into the production, harvest transport and so on of the wasted food generates over 3.3 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide. If food waste were a country, it'd be the world's 3rd largest greenhouse gas pig. Who knew! I didn't know.

Remember that Joni Mitchell song about the Big Yellow Taxi, pleading with the farmer to put away the DDT... She sang "spots on my apples but leave me the birds and the bees." Anybody know that song? It's a good song. Maybe we should sing it sometime here on a Friday night. But I confess I do find myself picking the spotless apple, the straightest carrot. We already donate our after-event food so that's good, but I don't always bring home my leftovers, and when I do, they often end in the bin, anyway.

As I prepared this sermon, I thought about the wilted triple-washed spinach that I bought, only to discover I already had some, you know? The old bag, is it going to go to waste? If my history is an indicator, it might be. But repentance is a first step, right? The other beauty of this story is that Jesus taught us how we, ourselves, are key. Jesus didn't collect the baskets back, Himself. He asked for this to happen, and He's asking us. He asks even those who are overflowing in abundance to remember their table scraps, because they are important. If they were important to Jesus, they should be important to us, His followers.

So... what can we do? It varies for everyone, but here are some steps I'm going to take. I'm going to pray on it. I'm going to check the fridge before I hit the store. I'm going to intentionally consider the weird- shaped fruit that I know is perfectly fine but someone else might not choose. Maybe I'll choose it. And I'm going to keep an eye on my garden, to make sure I pick everything and get it to Call Primrose Food Pantry over there, before it goes off, if I can't eat all of it or feed it to my friends. Do you have other fun ideas? If you do, I invite you to share them with me, and I'll put them on our FB page, our organization's FB page. Maybe BUMC can do the same thing. Wouldn't that be great? I like to say "never underestimate your ripple," and this could be one great big wave of hope for the hungry. I'm excited to take part, following the example of Jesus and His disciples, all those centuries ago, and hope that you might get excited about it, too. And so with that, I say, Amen.

