

Karen Hollis – scripture and sermon using Godly Play

July 29, 2018

John 6:1-14

- Green felt underlay
- Paper figures (8)
- Basket of bread for communion

This morning's gospel reading comes to us from Godly Play, a story-telling children's curriculum from the Episcopal Church USA.

God be with you.

(and also with you)

Place hand on lectern Bible

And now a story from John's gospel: ever ancient, ever new.

Move table to center aisle and lay out the green cloth on table.

Jesus and his disciples were in the countryside.

Place Jesus on the felt to your right. Place the disciples and the people in a crowd to your left facing Jesus.

A large crowd of people kept following Jesus, because they saw the signs he was doing for the sick.

Move Jesus and Philip as though speaking to each other.

Jesus said to Philip: "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?"

Philip answered, "6 months wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little."

Move Andrew closer to Jesus. Disciples show Jesus five loaves and two fish.

Andrew said to him, "There is a boy here who has 5 barley loaves and 2 fish. But what are they among so many people?"

Jesus told the disciples to get the people to sit down on the grass.

Move Jesus around the crowd.

Then Jesus took the bread and fish, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to those seated on the grass.

Move 1 disciple around the crowd.

When everyone's bellies were satisfied, the disciples collected the scraps of food that hadn't been eaten. They filled twelve baskets with the scraps left over!

Place hand behind Jesus.

People noticed all the food left over; they were amazed at what Jesus had done, and took it as a sign of God's work in their midst.

I invite us to wonder a bit about this story. We can wonder quietly, we can also wonder aloud by speaking ideas about the wondering questions I will ask. (sit on stool)

I wonder which part of the story is most important?

I wonder if there is a part of the story we could leave out and still have the whole story?

I wonder what Jesus might have been talking about to his disciples?

I wonder if you had been in the crowd would you have been surprised at what Jesus did?

I wonder which part of the story is most about you?

I wonder how there could have been enough for all to eat?

This was my persistent wondering question this week. How there was enough for everyone. What happened? Did Jesus change the loaves into Elven Waybread from Lord of the Rings? Do you remember those little cakes from the books or movies? They're wrapped in leaves, last forever and provide a full meal in a single bite. Perhaps when Jesus passes the bread, people eat a bit and find themselves

strangely full. How much of the bread of life do we need to eat to be filled?

I wonder if it was something like Stone Soup – perhaps you read the book to your children or grandchildren. I remember my mom coming to my Kindergarten class and helping us make stone soup. The re-told version tells the story of 3 monks traveling through the mountains; they come to a village where everyone keeps to themselves and are judgmental and afraid of each other. The monks come into the town square and decide to make stone soup. People begin to notice them and little by little open up in curiosity and generosity. One monk says to another, “last time we made stone soup it was sweeter with some onion.” A woman chimes in, “I have onion” and runs home to get it. Someone suggest carrots; another, mushrooms; how about noodles, pea pods, gluten free soy sauce. People are buzzing about, finding ingredients, sharing ideas, and working together. They build the soup, layering the flavor with ingredient after ingredient, all the while astounded at the miracle of stone soup. How do you make soup from a stone? They

continued to work together and watch this miracle unfold. When the soup is ready they gather at tables with rice and steamed buns; they light lanterns and sit down to eat.

They realize by the time the monks leave that they had misplaced the miracle. Generosity had come into their midst and made soup. And there was more than enough for all because people were changed inside.

Isn't this what Jesus does for us? Change us on the inside? Doesn't Jesus in this story gather people in a grassy place and bring out the best in them? Jesus takes bread, gives thanks to God for the abundance God offers; he gives thanks for the abundance God awakens in us, and thanks for the overflowing generosity God motivates in us. Then Jesus offers people that life and that abundance with the generosity of God, knowing that when they experience it, they will share it with others. Perhaps they even took food from their own bags and put it in the baskets as they received. Generosity encourages generosity.

I signed up for evening briefings on the New York Times website the other day. In one briefing I heard about the shooting in Toronto,

wild fires in Greece, heat waves in Japan, children at the Mexican border whose parents have been deported, the daily dose of Trump. As we hear these stories each day, we are constantly asking, who are we among so much need? What do we have to offer? It's not so much an existential question as a practical question. What do we have to offer? What do you have to offer? What can you do to contribute to meeting the needs of the world? When we take stock of our energy, finances, resources, connections, we know where we're starting from.

In the 70's Millard and Linda Fuller did an inventory of their ability to help when they faced a great need for affordable and decent housing for the working poor in their town. With a few tools and a small group of volunteers they humbly began what would become Habitat for Humanity International. Their passion for justice, love of Jesus, and persistence, multiplied their efforts to make Habitat for Humanity what it is today. The Hollis family has spent quite a bit of time at Koinonia Farm in Americus, Georgia, where the Fullers prayed with other Christians about

how to address the housing needs. James and I have been there twice together. The community life would remind you somewhat of life on Iona – they worship morning, noon and evening, they eat meals together, work the farm together, homeschool their children, host visitors and invite them into the rhythms of life there. It is still a humble, yet vibrant place with hard working, faithful people who love God and see that invitational abundance of God.

I noticed a common element in the stories I've shared this morning. That common element was a focus. A project, not one that comes out of nowhere, but is grounded in the very real needs around them. Feeding people, housing people, bringing people together. A project people can see themselves in, and imagine what they can offer. Then more people get interested, someone else can build upon the vision. It starts to gain momentum and pretty soon there is something where before there was nothing. It can be as simple as making soup, or as elaborate as building neighborhoods.

It all begins with Jesus. On a farm in Georgia, on a grassy hillside in Galilee, in a

mountain village, in a little church on an island, Jesus takes bread, gives thanks to God for the abundance God offers; he gives thanks for the abundance God awakens in us, and thanks for the overflowing generosity God motivates in us. Then Jesus offers us that life and that abundance with the generosity of God, knowing that when we experience it, we will share it with others. Thanks be to God!

Carefully pack up the story materials.