

Enough Is Enough

John 6:1-21

Enough is enough. Those three simple words can mean something completely different depending on the punctuation mark that follows them or the tone of voice with which they are expressed. An exclamation point at the end of that sentence, or a frustrated tone of voice in the speaking of the words, can signal that one has reached the limits of one's tolerance for an ongoing, unwelcome circumstance, and an urgent demand for redress.

If the exclamation point is replaced with a period, suddenly "Enough is Enough" becomes a statement, rather than a demand; and is turned from an expression of frustration to a statement of calm reassurance. As in, "What I have may not be all that I might *wish for*, but I am blessed to have *enough* to meet my needs. And enough is good enough for me, right now.

In fact, "Enough is enough" originated as an English proverb that identified "enough" not as the minimum amount that barely permits one to eke out their existence, but with finding abundance and possibility in what one has.

In the story of Jesus feeding a hungry multitude, these ways of thinking "enough is enough" intersect. The disciples and Jesus have been running themselves ragged ministering to crowds of people. So, they sail across the Sea of Galilee and scale a mountain to get some rest. But a huge crowd of people who have heard about the miraculous things Jesus has been doing, follows them. Five thousand people! When the disciples spied this human tsunami approaching, they might have thought—or even said aloud—"Enough is enough!" What they see is the last straw in the endless demands placed on them and on Jesus. And they have had enough.

Jesus, though, sees something different. Jesus sees a grand opportunity to demonstrate what "enough is enough" can really mean. He asks one of the disciples—Philip—where they can buy enough bread to feed all these people. We are told that Jesus asked the question to test Philip. Jesus already had decided what he was going to do. I'm guessing he also knew that Philip's answer would be different from what Jesus had planned. Jesus was setting up a teachable moment for his disciples.

Philip gives a pragmatic answer to Jesus' question. Six months wages wouldn't be sufficient to buy enough bread to provide even a snack for everyone in this crowd. As if to support Philip's point about their not having the resources at their disposal to feed everyone, another disciple—Andrew—brings forward a young boy with five barley loaves and two dried fish. Which may be good enough to stave off hunger for this child and his family, but definitely not enough to feed the multitude.

The disciples see a massive problem and the scarcity of resources at their disposal for solving it. Their best bet would be to send everyone away. Instead, Jesus told them to have everyone sit in the grass and make themselves comfortable. Like guests at an outdoor feast, waiting for the first course to be brought to their table. Jesus did not apologize for not having enough for everyone. He took the five loaves and gave thanks to God for them. Then he began distributing

the broken bread as if there was no doubt in his mind that there was enough for every man, woman and child in that crowd. By the time he was finished the amount of food that should have only been enough for one family, turned out to be enough for a mountainside of families. Enough was enough! Actually, enough was more than enough. Because after everyone had as much as they wanted and were satisfied, there were twelve baskets of uneaten scraps!

There are two possible scenarios to explain how this could be. The most obvious and most dramatic explanation being that Jesus miraculously multiplied the bread and fish until there was a superabundance that was more than enough to satisfy every hungry mouth that was there.

The other explanation goes like this. Suppose that one boy was not the only one who had thought to pack a lunch before going traipsing up a mountain to see Jesus. What if others had carried with them enough food to provide them with a picnic for themselves and their family; but less than enough to share much of it with anybody else. When they saw the great crowds, they might have grown concerned to keep a tight grip on what they had brought for themselves. But when they saw a child take all the food that he had, little as that was, and hand it to Jesus to use for feeding others, something happened that inspired them to follow the child's example. They pulled out their lunches and offered to share with their neighbors who did not have enough, or anything at all, to eat.

The first time I heard this interpretation of the story, I'll confess that I dismissed it as being nothing more than a plausible explanation made up to satisfy the intellects of people who can't bring themselves to believe in actual miracles. As years have passed, though, I have retracted that judgment. Not because my faith that Jesus could literally make enough of anything out of not enough has weakened. I totally believe it could have gone down that way. What *has* changed is my opinion that the other explanation is any less miraculous than that.

From cover to cover of the Bible, God spins incredible miracles, starting with creating this whole cosmos out of nothing. Truth be told, a few of God's miracles, even I have a tough time finding credible at face value. Check out Joshua chapter 10 where it is claimed that God caused the sun to come to a dead stop in the middle of the sky to help the Israelites be victorious in a battle.

But all through the Bible, the biggest challenge to God's ability to do whatever God wants to do, is the lack of faith of men and women. One of the only incidents in the Gospels where Jesus is unable to perform miracles, was in his home town, *because the people there did not believe in him*. The only limitation on what Jesus can accomplish in his hometown of the Church—including this church—is the limits of our faith in what he can accomplish through us. So, it makes perfect sense that it was a much bigger deal for Jesus to use a little child's act of generosity to miraculously unblock the scarcity thinking of five thousand grownups, then to have simply miraculously multiplied the loaves and fishes himself. The truth is, God has already provided us with a world of abundance to fill every need. What God also provided us all with—is the free will to choose to see that everyone equally enjoys that abundance.

When Jesus asked his disciples how they could find the resources to feed the multitude, John lets us in on what Jesus was thinking. Which was that Jesus already had a plan in mind. The

question he put to the disciples was just a test to determine whether their response to his plan would be based on the scarcity of available resources, or a faith in him to do more than they could hope or imagine.

Notice that Jesus didn't ask IF they should do something to feed the people. For Jesus, that was a foregone conclusion. He went directly to the HOW of doing it. And I believe that Jesus has gone on asking his disciples in churches everywhere and at all times the same question. Where are we to find enough of what is necessary to address the needs around us? Like poverty, violence, injustice, sickness, addiction? As with, Philip, Andrew and the others, we may look at the enormous, endless needs; we may look at our limited resources of time, energy, ideas and money; and ask what can we possibly do with the little that we have? That's when revisiting this story can unlock the same miracle of abundance through us, as we read about on that Galilean hillside, where a child offered what little he had to Jesus, and a multitude was fed.

At the far limits of human reckoning on how to respond to overwhelming need, we encounter an "Enough is Enough" threshold. Either we can throw up our hands, saying "Enough is enough", and turn back from that threshold with the self-justification that what we have to give is not enough to make a difference. We can succumb to what is sometimes called "compassion fatigue."

Or we can step across the threshold in the faith that what we see as "not enough", when placed in Jesus' hands, can be turned into enough; and even "more than enough," than we ever imagined it could be.

© 2021 Raymond Medeiros

Preached FCCW/ July 25, 2021