

Never Enough

October 12, 2008

When I'm working on a message for Sunday mornings, I am constantly looking for anything that relates even remotely to the topic we're dealing with, and this time, I found some correlation between our cats' behavior and today's theme. As some of you are aware, we have two cats—Harley and Dave (short for Davidson), and they are really fun to have around.

However, it's interesting to see what happens when one of them goes back to one of their three food bowls and starts to eat. The other one usually is right behind the first, and even though there are three bowls of the very same food piled high, cat number two invariably goes directly to the bowl that the first cat on the scene chose, and tries to move the first cat out of the way so he can have food. It's almost as if cat number two has no clue that there are two other bowls within reach that are also filled full. I guess the second cat is afraid that the first cat will eat all there is, and he won't have any. They seem to be operating by the theory of scarcity—being sure there couldn't possibly be enough.

It occurs to me that their tendency may be somewhat similar to the way some of us are. Think about some of the concerns some of us have when it comes to retirement. Many of us worry about whether or not we will have enough money to sustain us. Have we set aside enough to make it?

When we live by the theory of scarcity, we worry about having enough of virtually everything—even having enough love for a relationship. I know families who are concerned about having children, wondering if there will be enough love to spread between life partner and child. I've heard folks voice worry that if we love one child, do we have enough love to love a second equally? Sometimes we're afraid that there's not enough love to give or receive, so we shut down, doing neither.

The same thing happens when it comes to looking at opportunities and possibilities. We seem to believe there are just so many open doors out there, and if someone else gets through first, there isn't one for us. And while I'm a far cry from an economist, I wonder if that's the kind of fear that is surfacing when we talk about the global economic status in which we find ourselves? Our stance is often that if someone or some country over there has some wealth or resource, then we don't. To combat that fear, our goal becomes to gain and hoard as much as we can so we can have enough.

The theory of scarcity says to us that supplies, food, opportunities are limited, and if someone else has some, we have none. Stephen Covey describes it this way: "People with a scarcity mentality tend to see everything in terms of win-lose. There is only so much, and if someone else has it, that means there will be less for me." That's the kind of mindset some of us may possess.

However, that isn't necessarily the only way to see things. Actually we can see that kind of thinking contrasted with another perspective in today's Bible passage. Let me read the first part of the story.

As the day declined, the Twelve said, "Dismiss the crowd so they can go to the farms or villages around here and get a room for the night and a bite to eat. We're out in the middle of nowhere."

"You feed them," Jesus said.

They said, "We couldn't scrape up more than five loaves of bread and a couple of fish—unless, of course, you want us to go to town ourselves and buy food for everybody. (There were more than five thousand people in the crowd.)"

I don't know about you, but it seems that the disciples were in a scarcity mindset. And it could seem perfectly logical if you think about the fact that the story says that they had only 5 loaves of bread of 2 fish that they intended for themselves. There had been no anticipation or expectation that we might have to try to feed the 5000 who were said to have been there!

I can only imagine the conversation that took place when Jesus told the disciples to feed the crowd! Since we have to read between the lines in most of our Bible stories to get the real picture, I'll share a bit of what I think might have happened.

I suspect the disciples responded to him with words that might have gone something along the lines of, "Jesus, you've lost your mind! There's not even enough here for us, and if we try to feed any of them, we'll run out after the first two people! Then we'll have a riot on our hands! What are you thinking?"

However, we need to note that that the part of the story we have heard is not the end. Jesus steps in, and the story continues:

But Jesus went ahead and directed his disciples, "Sit them down in groups of about fifty." They did what he said, and soon had everyone seated. He took the five loaves and two fish, lifted his face to heaven in prayer, blessed, broke, and gave the bread and fish to the disciples to hand out to the crowd. After the people had all eaten their fill, the twelve baskets of leftovers were gathered up.

You see, Jesus seemed to have a different perspective on things. He took the meager food they had in their possession, gave thanks for it, blessed and broke the bread and fish, and then asked his disciples to pass it around to the groups that had collected together. And you know what? At the end of it all, everyone had all they wanted, and there were plenty of leftovers!

Now how do you suppose that happened? Did Jesus perform some sort of hocus-pocus and multiply the food? Was it a "miracle?" Maybe. I don't know.

However, I wonder if something else might have been happening. I wonder if Jesus sensed that most of the folks there wouldn't have left home for a day's journey without some sort of sustenance. They would not have undertaken such a thing empty-handed, especially since they were probably from around the region and knew it could be pretty rugged in that part of the country. The only wise thing to do was to pack at

least some morsel of food that could sustain them until they got back home.

My guess is that most of them had intended to sneak off by themselves and nibble on the little bit of food they'd brought along for themselves. However, when they witnessed what Jesus did—that he was willing to share what little he had with others—they were changed. When they saw him be thankful for what he had, and then be willing to share what he had, that totally changed their mindset. In my mind's eye, I can see each of them slowly but surely pulling out their little morsel of food, and passing it around their circle of 50 or so. When all of them shared, they had more than enough to go around. To me, that's the real miracle of the story.

The reality is that the fear of not having enough is a very normal human response, but it doesn't have to be that way. The promise is that with God, there is always enough. In fact, there's more than enough! There's more than enough food for everyone, if we're willing to share. There's more love than we could ever possibly imagine! There's more hope than we dream possible; There's more forgiveness than we think we deserve; There's more than enough opportunities to wipe the slate clean and start again; there are more possibilities for connecting with God and one another than we ever take advantage of; there's plenty of healing for the brokenness of our lives.

Today we're going to symbolize the reality that there's more than enough as we share in communion. Now it might be easy for us to think the same thing a small child did when some friends were going to church with his family. The little guy was six-years-old, and as they got settled in their seats, he asked his adult friends, "Are you going to eat with us today?" They realized he was referring to communion, and told him yes, they were. The boy pointed at what was laid out, and said, "Well, I'll warn you. You're not going to get much!"

That's the way it looks, doesn't it, at least from that perspective? This little bit of food won't come close to satisfying our physical hunger, or so we think. We may be wondering if, in fact, there is enough to go around today. Is there enough of that food and drink for me? And that might just be the tip of the iceberg, as we find ourselves wondering, "Is there enough love for me? Or forgiveness? How about enough to fill the emptiness in my soul? Is there enough?"

With God, the answer is always, "Yes, there is enough, more than enough. There's more love than you could imagine, more hope than you can see now, more forgiveness than you think you merit, more opportunities than you think could exist." With God, there's always enough to go around. We're not in short supply of whatever we need.

That's what we're doing when we share in communion together. We're symbolizing that whatever is in our heart that needs healing can be healed; whatever despair we're experiencing can turn to hope; whatever sense of alienation we have from someone else can be bridged; whatever fear we have can be calmed.

As I always say, everyone is welcome to participate. It does not matter where we've been or what we've done, God has enough love and forgiveness to greet us at the table. And it doesn't matter what the food is, because actually, we have communion together here every Sunday with our bagels and coffee, our donuts and juice. Every time we take a bite of the food that's offered, we can know that there's plenty of everything to go around, because it all comes from God, and God does not have any sense of there not being enough!