

REFLECTION
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John 6:1-21

...When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" Jesus said, "Make the people sit down."

If we've learned one thing together in the past 35 years it is —

*Never underestimate what God can do with a little bit of something
when faith and grace work together.*

Even if you haven't been here for the 35-years I've experienced in this place and with this community—*faith and grace have been doing their thing together*—astonishingly—in every turn along the way. Who was it that said,

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens
can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."*

That was the great Margaret Mead—the American cultural anthropologist of the mid-20th century who discovered that in the course of history around the world—real change, the kind that shifts cultures—happens “on the ground,” or, “from the ground up”—by small groups of committed people. Ha! I learned watching my son play lacrosse—“Ground balls win games.” I think even that translates:

*Never underestimate what God can do with a little bit of something—
or a few people— when faith and grace work together.*

Not everyone believes this. I remember sitting around a table 30-plus years ago here at Epiphany for a meeting we called “The Summit.” With high hopes and expectations we invited nine people with expertise in various aspects of church development to sit with us and help us figure out how

to rebuild Epiphany Church. We put together the demographics, the history, the vision. Folders were ready. Chairs arranged. The guests arrived and the meeting began. It didn't take long to discern the direction the conversation was taking. I remember the doom-and-gloom on the faces of these consultants. "Can't be done. The numbers don't add up." "Nice try." It was right then I learned something they forgot to teach in seminary —

Real change doesn't happen from the outside in, but from the inside out.

Now fueled with a little holy anger— we began to look to each other.

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or a few committed people— when faith and grace work together.*

Can you image if today's story from the Gospel of John were to end with Philip and Andrew's perspective? When Jesus saw a large crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" Philip couldn't image how they could afford to buy enough. Andrew saw a boy with the five loaves and a few fish in his basket. Even if we nabbed that, it wouldn't be enough. So they answered Jesus— "Can't be done. The numbers don't add up." "Nice try." But Jesus took and blessed what there was, distributed it—and... *miracle upon miracle*, they were all satisfied and filled twelve baskets with the leftovers. You think that's not possible?

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It's called "God's economy." I can't tell you how it works, but I see it happening almost every day. I'm deeply suspect of sermons that try to explain what the Gospels call *miracles and signs and wonders*. In doing so, (You know, "Oh, they all shared what they had...") we explain away the wonder and mystery of it all. Miracles and signs and wonders are to be enjoyed. Celebrated. Not explained. They are medicine for the soul. Helen Donovan—an old-timer who was part of the fabric of this place for many years—took me aside one day as we stood in the kitchen of the

renovated Chapel—“Tell me again how we got this?” I honestly said in response, “I really don’t know.” I should have said,

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The Gospel of John is built around stories that include miracles and wonders —“*signs*” as biblical scholars have come to call them. “Signs” point the way. They are directional. They help keep us on the right path. There are seven of them in the Gospel of John. (Some count eight or more as they look at the John’s Gospel.)

- ~ Jesus changes water to wine at a wedding in Cana of Galilee.
- ~ Jesus heals the royal officer’s son at Capernaum
- ~ Jesus heals the paralytic at Bethesda
- ~ Jesus feeds 5000 over on the north shore of Galilee
- ~ And then Jesus walks on water — coming to his disciples in their boat
- ~ Jesus heals a man blind from birth in Jerusalem
- ~ And down in Bethany, Jesus raises Lazarus out of a tomb

I love these stories. Especially the part about them seeming impossible. And all those sermons—preached by people with expertise in various aspects of church development and biblical training.... that try to explain them away. That’s part of the story. Why don’t they just say, “I really don’t know!” But if they’ve been around long enough, they’ve probably seen them all. I’ve seen them all. Right here. Signs along the way that are medicine for the soul! Signs that let you know you’re headed in the right direction.

Donna. Do you remember the wedding here at Epiphany when there was no wine? We always provide the Cup of Blessing at the end of the marriage service—It is the outward sign of the marriage blessing. But there was no wine to be found and no time to go buy some. I checked everywhere in the church. Then, just minutes before the service began I went into the sacristy

and there was a case of wine. It wasn't there before. Do I need to explain it? Or was it *God's economy*? I really don't know!

And Jack Malpas. Do you remember watching that old broken man wrapped in years of guilt and shame? He was a victim too many good works during the Civil Rights movement and maybe got a little too big for his britches. He was stripped of his ordination as a priest. He was with us here for a few years, and then, right here, he was received back into Holy Orders. What I didn't expect was that he resurrected like a dinosaur and appeared in an all-black clerical garb from 30 years earlier from that day on. And took on other vestiges of the past as well. What a sight Lazarus and his tattered burial wrapping. Or was it God's economy? I really don't know!

Men and women born blind from birth? We've seen dozens of them right here learn to see with new eyes. Or was it God's economy? I really don't know!

God's economy was explained to me by the late Bishop David Leighton. I had an unnerving experience while I was in the Lake District in England. I was wandering in some beautiful lush green fields lined with stone walls. I was wandering alone with some heavy things on my heart when I came upon a white stucco chapel—a small single chamber with an open door and one open window. I went in. No one was around so I sang the doxology in Lakota, as I love to do. I looked out the window and saw a man at a good distance dressed in wool plaid hunting jacket and carrying a rifle. Our eyes met. I thought maybe I should be afraid. When I looked up again he was nowhere to be seen—nowhere on the landscape, but my heart had lifted and I felt that everything—everything I was worried about would be ok. I told Bishop Leighton about the experience. He said, “Oh, you saw an angel.” I didn't understand. “*God uses everyday things and everyday people* to bring messages of hope and joy. It's called ‘God's economy.’” I knew he was right. What else would an angel look like on an English countryside?

Jesus saw a great crowd of people who had followed him because they were in need of healing and hope. He fed the five thousand and all were satisfied with enough left over to share with

more. How many people do you think have gathered today in need of healing and hope? Here and around the world? How many pieces of bread have been shared? When do we stop trying to explain it away. Miracles and signs and wonders are to be enjoyed. Celebrated. They let us know we're headed in the right direction. They are medicine for the soul.

If we've learned one thing together in the past three decades, remember—

*Never underestimate what God can do with a little bit of something—
or a few committed people— when faith and grace work together.*

We are surrounded by angels and miracles and signs and wonders. God uses everyday things and everyday people to bring messages of hope and joy. Don't be afraid. Lift up your heart. It will all be alright.

AMEN