



Ravensworth

BAPTIST CHURCH

May 22, 2022 | Sixth Sunday of Easter

John 6

Holy Responsibility

Rev. Dr. Leah Grundset Davis, preaching

In news that will surprise absolutely no one, I take homework seriously. After Anna's fantastic sermon last week about holy creatures and the invitation to spend time with creatures in this world, I sat on my porch on Sunday evening to see what I might notice if I just took a few moments to pay attention.

As I sat there, a thunderstorm was rolling in, but never actually came to my doorstep. It was far enough off that at first the red-winged blackbirds were still singing, the wasps that we can't seem to get rid of were still buzzing around our front windows, and the neighbors' sheep and donkeys were making plenty of noise.

But then, the storm edged closer and the wind picked up, going from not even a whistle to gusts in just a matter of moments. What amazed me was that the animals knew long before I knew it was here. Before the gusts came, the red-winged blackbirds hushed their singing, the wasps flew off to somewhere their miniature wings would stay dry, and the donkeys and sheep went inside the barn.

I sat on the porch, watching the storm off in the distance, watched it pass by, and sure enough, within about 20 minutes, the birds were singing again, the wasps came back, the sheep and donkeys reminded everyone they needed dinner.

And for the first time in a long time, I breathed deeply and paid attention, aware that my faith was being stretched in a way I couldn't understand and I was being invited to another way—if I would just listen to the abundance around me.

This series about creation and the world around us has been an invitation to slow down and pay attention to what is around us in the world. We've marveled at soil, water, creatures, and this week is our invitation to consider what our holy responsibility might be within it all. Is there another way to live in the midst of what we know is a groaning creation, a hurting world, a grieving people?

The writer of the Gospel of John had the same questions, as he sat down all those years ago to write the last gospel in our Bible. In chapter 6, Jesus was out and about with the disciples and went up a mountain. It was almost Passover so they were likely making plans of how to remember the holy day that marked a liberating God and the possibility of another way of life.

When he looked up, Jesus saw a large crowd coming toward him, out there in the wilderness, about 5000 people in all. People of all ages and backgrounds gathering out there.

Jesus turned to Philip and said, "Where will get bread for these people to eat?" In the Message version, it says that Jesus asked Philip this because he wanted to stretch Philip's faith, his imagination, the possibilities of what could be and

how they could do it together. Jesus already knew what he was going to do, whatever that was.

There was a story Jesus was inviting Philip (and us) to remember, that another time, close to that first Passover, there had been a large group of people in the wilderness, wandering about, with a great prophet-teacher who ascended a mountain, and when he came down, there was bread—manna—for days, for years, that sustained the people. There had been another way as the people continued to follow the liberating God.

Jesus told the disciples to have the people sit down on the grass, that large patch of grass in the wilderness, and the Good Shepherd took the 5 loaves and 2 fish and the 5000 people ate until they were satisfied. There was enough. There was more than enough actually, John says. There were 12 baskets leftover! One basket for each disciple who might need to remember that following Jesus is an invitation to stretch their faith, to open themselves up to the possibility of what could be, when the way is filled with abundance and not with scarcity.

Because, a theology or any -ology based on scarcity, wants to produce fear, and try to control. It leads to the demonizing of others, of people thinking they deserve more bread or more fish than others, hoarding instead of sharing, hating instead of loving.

These ideologies of scarcity and hate are still with us today. Last week, the targeted murder of Black people in a Tops Supermarket in Buffalo was based on an ideology of fear and hate, of white supremacy and Christian nationalism. Ideologies of scarcity—the basis of systems of oppression like colonialism, capitalism, patriarchalism, racism, exist and thrive on the idea that one group must have more.

But that is not truth. We know it is not true. It's an ideology of control and scarcity and fear. Jesus showed us another way, and as the people who try to follow what he says, we must speak and act against ideologies that narrow us, narrow the world into systems of scarcity and hate.

Last week, we saw a grocery store, a place of feasting and community, become a place of death and of evil. The murders took place in a grocery store, the place a community gathered for bread—birthday party cakes, snacks for visiting grandchildren, movie night treats for a family, canned food picked up for a community food bank. Mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, friends were killed because of white supremacy and an ideology of hate. Black people in our country once again targets of the evils and sin of white supremacy.

We have a holy responsibility of living every day with a commitment to eradicate hatred and any system that oppresses anyone or anything. We have a holy responsibility of living with a sense of abundance instead of scarcity.

Jesus invites us to stretch our faith---instead of seeing 5 loaves and 2 fish, to seeing the possibilities of what can be when systems of scarcity and oppression are wiped out, and instead the 5000 people are filled, and there is more leftover for whoever might come along next in the wilderness.

The feast that Jesus promises is the feast from the bread of life even in the wilderness as we practice it in community, in hope.

This work in community is so important. It's how change happens, how systems are tilted toward abundance and start to forget that scarcity was once there, less false memories of how things used to be back in Egypt, and more awareness to the manna that is right in front of us now.

At RBC,

- This is why we participate in the Capital pride parade, so that everyone knows they are Beloved.
- This is why we gather a ton of food for ACCA, so that 5 cans of beans and 2 diaper packets might be enough for 5000 people.
- This is why we do the hard work of excavating the roots of white supremacy within us so that liberation takes place.
- This is why we work for sustainable practices for creation, here at church and in our communities.
- This is why we make sure every 5th grader at Braddock Elementary has a tshirt so they can celebrate their accomplishments!
- This is why the work of PDO is so important and we celebrate it today. The promise of a non-sectarian, fully welcoming, preschool where kids are loved, and shaped, and learn alongside others who they might never meet otherwise.

This is why! Because we believe in a holy responsibility of
love instead of hate,
hope instead of despair,
liberation and abundance instead of scarcity.

We believe in the possibility of what could be in the world alongside the Creator, the Risen Christ, and Holy Spirit.

Thanks be to God. Amen.