

### Third Sunday in Lent - March 23, 2025

Exodus 16:2–18; Psalm 65:5–13; Acts 27:1, 27–38; Luke 9:12 –17

#### “Hidden provision”

1. I have seen my mom perform magic.
  - a. Well, at least be able to stretch a tight budget like it was a magic act.
    - i. I must have been in Middle School. I remember sitting on my mom and dad's bed talking with her when my dad came in after having cashed his modest paycheck as a public school teacher in Mexico.
    - ii. Some of you have heard this story.
    - iii. He gave my mom an envelope with money which she then opened and started to make little piles of bills on their bedroom dresser.
    - iv. She narrated the process for my benefit, I believe
    - v. The first pile I remember was for their tithe, their offering to the church.
    - vi. Then followed other piles, for the mortgage, the light bill, etc.
    - vii. There were probably six or seven piles of money.
    - viii. None of them looked very thick.
    - ix. Then I remember that at the very end my mom grabbed some of the remaining bills from the envelope and gave them back to my dad, for his spending money.
  - b. That image of how mom and dad managed that small amount of money made a big impact on me.
    - i. I knew that dad's salary was small, yet I knew that with mom's management we had never gone without. Mom made do with very little.
    - ii. Dad also did a little bit of magic of his own, somehow stretching the 24 hours of his day and the seven days of the week to fit in time for a second and at times a third job to make ends meet
    - iii. What this experience taught me was not only about their savvy with finances and making a household run, but it taught me about their faithfulness and their trust in God.
    - iv. They knew very well their budget was modest, but they also knew that God had always found a way of providing for us as a family.
    - v. Their experience was that God had a way of making things work for them.
    - vi. It's not that there weren't difficult times, because they faced challenges, and at times had to dip into savings, seek family support, but God seemed to come through at the right time.
2. In today's gospel story, we hear of a surprising moment when, as if by magic or by miracle, a large crowd of at least 5,000 men (plus women and children) was fed in the desert
  - a. Picture the total number of students from North (2,224) and East (1,535) High Schools, combined, and double it and that's the crowd we're talking about.
  - b. The story is a bit odd.
    - i. Jesus' fame as a healer was growing. People sought him out
    - ii. And his fame as a teacher was also growing, preaching in their synagogues and even out in the open to large crowds.

- iii. Then right before this passage, Jesus had selected the twelve disciples and hand empowered them to heal and teach, and sent them out throughout nearby villages to do this ministry
- iv. He told them to travel very light and let the hospitality offered to them be their only sustenance
- v. They had JUST gotten back from that experience and were eager to tell Jesus all about it, and Jesus wanted to hear about it and process with them
- vi. So Jesus took the disciples to a deserted place, so they could have some time alone, away from the crowds.
- vii. But (you guessed it) the crowds figured it out. Someone must have recognized Jesus, and word spread, and before you know it, a massive crowd found them in the desert.
- viii. Jesus was gracious and changed gears: he healed and taught them.
- ix. The disciples were annoyed and impatient. They had expected to have some private time with Jesus, but their agenda was hijacked by all these needy people who miraculously materialized out of thin air
- c. This massive crowd was in deep need, and Jesus was providing them with the healing and comfort they needed
  - i. But the disciples wanted them gone, they didn't see them as their responsibility, and so, when the day was about over, the disciples try to convince Jesus to give the benediction and end the service.
  - ii. Send them away. It's late. They're probably hungry. We're in the middle of nowhere. Look, Jesus, we just need them to go...
  - iii. And Jesus, perhaps sensing their annoyance, reframes the issue
  - iv. If you're so worried about them, YOU give them something to eat
  - v. Remember, they had just come back from doing their own ministry, out there on their own, healing and teaching, their first little solo flight if you would
  - vi. But it was almost like they forgot everything in that selfish moment
  - vii. They had traveled light and depended hospitality of entire communities!
  - viii. And looking into their backpacks, they saw nothing but scarcity: How can we possibly feed 5,000 when all we have is 5 loaves and 2 fish!!
  - ix. Jesus does something we might consider unexpected and perhaps even unremarkable: he tells them to ask the massive crowd to subdivide, to form small groups of 50 or so per group. 100 or so little gatherings.
  - x. But I now think that was critical, because Jesus helped the crowd (a mixture of strangers and people who knew each other) and molded them into small temporary communities, and in that more manageable size activated the hospitality which is such a part of their culture
  - xi. Jesus gave thanks and got the ball rolling with the sharing of these few loaves and fish
  - xii. The disciples had brought those provisions for themselves, because who goes into a deserted place without at least a little to eat and drink?
  - xiii. Picture the crowds thinking the same. Take a little something.
  - xiv. Not a full picnic, mind you, but a little bit

- xv. And what if we're all then encouraged to care for one another, And my little bit is shared with your little bit?
  - xvi. So they witnessed (and embodied) a miracle.
  - xvii. I don't want to rob you of an image you may have in your mind of Jesus miraculously multiplying the loaves and fish, digging into a bottomless backpack and coming up with more and more provisions
  - xviii. The mystery of the moment remains – it can't just be explained away
  - xix. But the point of the story is that hospitality emerged in their instant small communities, and they encountered amazing abundance.
  - xx. And the passage said they were all satisfied. They had been healed. They had been taught. And now they had been filled. And there were even leftovers...
3. Growing up with my mom and dad as my first teacher of the faith, one of the key lessons I learned (by seeing them live it out) was this: God will provide
- a. It's a statement of faith and trust. I'm at the end of my rope: God will provide!
  - b. But in a way, it can be misunderstood as an emergency measure, when all else fails
  - c. In case of emergency, break glass and use fire extinguisher, let's say
  - d. But I believe there is another way of understanding it too, and today's story I think opens that up for us
  - e. Imagine if we approached our moments of uncertainty, of insecurity, of need with a belief that God has ALREADY provided!
  - f. That is to say, there is an abundance around us which God has given, but which may be a hidden provision, one we hadn't noticed or valued
  - g. Many of you lived through a moment of abundance, of hidden provision in the midst of crisis during the floods the community experienced in 2008
    - i. Not only were the professionals involved, first responders, medical staff, emergency assistance organizations,
    - ii. but small circles of community formed,
      - 1. people taking in friends or relatives into their homes,
      - 2. strangers working together,
      - 3. a miracle of support in the time of need of so many, meant to address a tragedy which affected some more than others
    - iii. Some could have said: I live on an unaffected side of town, and besides what can I possibly do with my meager resources?
    - iv. A lot, it turns out, when it's a whole community which sees the need of some as the responsibility of all.
  - h. Imagine what it would be like if we as a full community saw other crises in Columbus through that same "flood response" lens!
    - i. There would not be a single child going to bed hungry
    - ii. There would not be a vet unable to find a safe and affordable place to live
    - iii. There would not be a teacher taking on a second job to make ends meet
    - iv. There would not be a grandma forced to pick between buying meds or food
4. Jesus has shown us that in God there is hidden provision already among us. We ourselves have felt its effect in community. We have the solutions to our problems sitting in the bottom of our backpacks, if we're brave enough to use them believing in God's abundance.