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Osler Mennonite Church

**The Bread We Have:**  
*John 6:1-15; Psalm 145:9-19*

Good Morning Everyone,

Often when I look at the scripture, I find a challenge or a call to action. Coming to our scripture texts for this morning I relaxed into a different perspective. There are some stories in the Bible that we read again and again. Our loaves and fishes story is one of these. My instinct when coming across something familiar is to scan it for what I have previously missed, to have my eyes open to a new understanding or application, based on the research I can access or the context I find myself in. But this time reading through I sank down into the comfort of a familiar story. I think there are gifts for us in this as well, a calling into what is familiar, a starting place to ground into and find assurance in. A bit of a touchstone to stabilize myself when I am spinning in all different directions of growing, and stretching, and learning. Today's scriptures feel like coming home.

Our Psalm today is actually one of these 'home coming' texts, not just in the Christian tradition, but in Jewish tradition as well. It is referred to in the Talmud as a 'Tehillah' and is raised as a Psalm to be repeated, to come back to as a community of faith as a way of forming people. It is taught that everyone who repeats the Tehillah three times a day may be sure that they are a child of the world to come. Just before our last Hymn, we listened to Psalm 145 being read. Following the wisdom of the Jewish community I am going to read it through twice more, once now, and then again near the close of my reflection.

Before I start reading it now, I invite you to take a moment and decide how you want to read this Psalm again. You can open up your bulletins, or pause this video and grab your Bibles at home. You can grab a pencil and mark up the document or draw as you hear the words. You can lean back into your seat and close your eyes to listen. You can mouth along the words as I read, or even say them aloud, I promise I don't mind. I'm going to take a deep breath in and out, and I invite you to turn again to **Psalm 145:9-19...**

The tradition of reading this Psalm over and over, well any scripture passage really, is to allow it to shift us slowly, like the work of a stream on a boulder. The words flow over us, through us, find a way of continuing God's story - shaping us into being a part of that process. Psalm 145 is a Psalm of defiant hope and praise. Before this Psalm we have six Psalms of lament; a time of exile and despair. Then Psalm 145 raises up in unapologetic praise, describing all of creation rejoicing in the splendor of God's world, in the never-ending acts of compassion and provision.

To repeat these verses is to dare to live in the hope that these words are true, even in a surrounding of exile and despair. And to allow these verses to wash over us and mold us transforms them from a knowing in our hearts or minds to a forming of how we will live because of this belief. To live into a world that can experience the claims of the Psalmist. A world that knows the priorities and values of God: for all to experience love and provision and compassion.

All of the reasons that the Psalmist wrote the prior six songs of lament are still present in their community. In fact, they are still present in our world today. And still, there is a praise song. Jan Richardson is an extraordinary writer who has published multiple books on blessings. She argues that blessings are not an arrival of everything good and an erasure of everything bad, nor do they try to make sense of all that's wrong in the world around us.

Instead, blessings help us to see the thread of hope that remains in all the pieces of life. They invite us into an assurance that God's love, grace, and goodness are present always. I think our Psalmist's words fulfill this understanding. To be a people shaped by Psalm 145 is to be a people disciplined by hope. These verses are a witness to the ongoing, enduring, and stubborn presence of good. To be a community living into God's reign rather than human power structures.

Jesus gives us a similar invitation in our loaves and fishes story. Jesus is starting year two in his ministry, and John's gospel uses this year to present Jesus as the 'Divine

Revealer.’ Jesus takes beliefs and traditions that are already foundational for the community, and then unfolds these truths with new applications and a reinterpretation of God. It is just before the time of Passover, a time of year where stories of Israel’s exodus are told, and God’s provision in the wilderness is at the front of everyone’s mind. This context creates a parallel between this miracle story and God’s provision of Manna in the wilderness.

But Jesus doesn’t start by pulling food out of nowhere. He looks around and asks ‘what do we have available to us here? What bread do we have access to?’ To anyone with a mind for logistics like poor Phillip, this is a ludicrous question. Why start counting your pennies when you know the need is so much greater than what you can provide for. Andrew explains patiently to Jesus that they do in fact have some food, but not very much, really not enough at all, not enough to make any kind of difference.

But that’s not what Jesus was asking. Jesus is teaching the disciples to ask themselves a new question. Instead of ‘how much food do we need to fix this problem,’ he wants them to ask ‘what do we have to start with; what does this community have going on already?’ When we look around us at our communities and think of the love, and care, and work that is required to get even a fraction closer to the description found in our Psalm, my response is very like Phillip’s: ‘even if we spend the entire year on nothing but that, I won’t be able to help everybody. I won’t be able to fix it.’ But Jesus didn’t ask me how much it was going to take to fix it. Jesus’ question starts with ‘where.’ ‘Where do we begin? where is there access to food? where are the pieces of blessing in a sea of need?’

Bishop Michael Curry observes that one of our stumbling blocks in discipleship is that we keep trying to fix everything on our own, and then we get overwhelmed, and then we despair. When we make the decision to live into a world built on love, we need to start with what we have, and then we need to get some help. We need the support of God

and we need the support of the community because this work is recovery work, reclaiming work, transforming work, and we do not get this work done in isolation.

The heart of this story is the miracle of grace, it is a vision of a world of abundance, where all sit together and have enough. It is Jesus' invitation to join into this world now, to tangibly participate in creating these spaces and places in our world. To be a people that dare to live out the claim that God makes: that all can be loved, will be loved, are loved. That this statement is not just a spiritual sentiment but a concrete response. It is grace lived out. And to enter into this state - not when everything around us is all better, but in the midst of the need. To cling to threads of blessing and hope and goodness like the Psalmist, when we are still on the heels of destruction. **Psalm 145:9-19...**

I will leave you with words of blessing from Cheryl Lawrie. May they give you permission to find your hearts resting in the familiar call of today's scriptures, that together we can be a community where God's power is manifest in gracious, compassionate, love. A blessing by Cheryl Lawrie:

They are right,  
 those who doubt what we do.  
 It is purely the product of over-active imaginations.  
 Who but the foolish would look at barren ground and imagine food for all,  
 see past desolation and believe it will become an oasis,  
 would not be stopped by war, but live for the day it will be peace,  
 and reach deep into the world's fear in the prayer it would bring life.  
 So if faith is the terrain of the deluded  
 then may you leave here with the faith of the fools  
 who have loved the world since it's beginning  
 and will live for its redemption until its end.  
 Amen.

*Sources Used: New Interpreters Bible Commentary, Believers Bible Commentary, Working Preacher Blog, Kate Bowler's Podcast 'Everything Happens' ep. Jan Richardson & ep. Bishop Michael Curry, Cheryl Lawrie <http://holdthisspace.org.au/>*