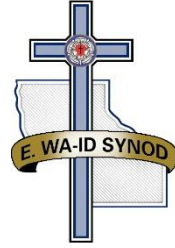


January 2018



Once upon a time, there was a young boy who had traveled some distance to hear a well-known preacher speak at a revival meeting. His mother had packed him a small lunch so that he wouldn't be too hungry to make the walk back home in the evening. It wasn't much, by any standard—a sandwich, intended to be all he ate for the entire day.

The young boy settled in to listen to the preacher. The preacher was so kind and so gentle, and seemed to really have a heart for the lost and neglected and forgotten ones. Being near him made the boy happy. But toward the end of the sermon, the people around the boy started getting restless. They were hungry. They hadn't had brought food with them, whether that was because they didn't have any to bring, or because they were too excited to plan ahead. Either way: their tummies were empty, and they were feeling it. The boy thought about his sandwich, thanking God that he had a mother who was kind enough and wise enough to send him to this gathering with a meal hidden in his tunic.

The preacher realized the crowd was hungry, too. He instructed his followers to feed them. The followers looked at each other with shock and panic. There were probably close to 20,000 men, women, and children gathered for the meeting! How were they going to find (and pay for!) food for that many people? It was impossible! The need was too great, and they were just ordinary people. The boy watched them closely, still thinking about his sandwich. One sandwich wasn't much among so many people, but maybe he could at least offer his sandwich to the preacher so the preacher wouldn't have to be hungry. The more he thought about it, the more he thought that was what God would want him to do. He walked up to one of the preacher's followers, tugged on his robe, and held up his tiny sardine sandwich. The follower stared at him, confused, but the preacher smiled warmly. Reaching around the dumbstruck man, the preacher accepted the sandwich. The boy smiled, waiting for the preacher to sink his teeth into the homemade bread, enjoying the simple goodness of the wheat against the oily goodness of the sardine. But the preacher held up the sandwich, gave thanks to God for it, and then told his followers to feed the 20,000 people with the sandwich. The followers looked at each other. Then they looked at the sandwich. Then they looked at each other again, shrugged, and started handing out one sandwich to the crowd.

The boy was amazed! His one sandwich was passed from hand to hand to hand amongst all the people, and the people ate that one sandwich until they were FULL! The boy couldn't ever remember a time when he had had enough food to eat until he was full—at best he could eat until the hunger pangs went away, but he never remembered being full. The preacher caught his eye and winked, a warm smile flashing at the boy through his curly beard and he sat and watched the enormous crowd of hungry people gulping and smacking their lips and smiling and laughing and eating until no one could eat another bite. They were stuffed FULL. Some of them started to fall asleep there in the sunlight, snoring softly, breadcrumbs on their tunics and their fingers oily from the fish. The preacher laughed softly to hear it, clapping his hands quietly in joy. His followers returned, amazed, and Jesus told them to gather up all the leftovers. The boy thought, "It was ONE sandwich! How can there be any leftovers when everyone ate as much as they did? One sandwich isn't enough to fill anyone to bursting—but this one

fed thousands? How could there possibly be anything left over?” But he hadn’t spent as much time with Jesus as the disciples had. They dutifully collected the leftover bits that littered the grass, stepping over sleeping people, stopping to chat with those who were still awake and picking fish bones out of their teeth. Jesus and the boy ate together, watching their progress. When everything was collected, there were TWELVE baskets of food leftover. From his single, humble sandwich, there were enough leftovers to feed this crowd for another meal. What sort of miracle was this?

Jesus thanked the boy for sharing his lunch, blessed him, and sent him toward home with a friendly swat on the backside. For the rest of his life, the boy never forgot what God could do with one single sandwich.

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You are gathering together today to do important work as congregations. You will be electing new leaders, you will be hearing reports of ministries overseen by your congregation in 2017, you will be voting on a new spending plan for the year. It’s not glamorous work, but it is important work.

I said at my election in May that God has already abundantly provided what we need to have to accomplish the work God has for us to do in the Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod. We’re not waiting for anything, or anyone. Everything is ready. Everyone is here.

But our tendency as humans is to look at what we have, and think, “It’s not enough.” Or “They are asking too much!” The Devil leads us down the path of scarcity all the time, because the devil knows that is where we are most vulnerable. I wrote the midrash of the Feeding of the 5,000 because I wanted you to have in front of you a story that reminds us of the abundance of God—so that when you start feeling the “not enough” panic you can quickly read a story to remind you of the truth: with God, all things are possible. With God, a sandwich can feed a multitude.

It’s true that we could always use more money. That’s true in our homes, our congregations, our schools, and it’s certainly true in the Synod. There’s so much need! And our resources feel so finite! It’s not enough, it will never be enough, so why bother at all?

Sound familiar?

So I encourage you: before you vote on your budget, take a moment and have someone lead the group in a prayer that we would be made aware of the abundance of God. That we will have enough. That in many cases: we will have more than enough. And though when we look at our bottom lines, and see everything getting smaller...giving...membership...average worship attendance...budgets...perhaps what God is leading us to is full reliance on God, rather than ourselves or our money or our numbers. “See, I am about to do a new thing!” God tells us. Watch for it. Wait for it. Listen for it. It won’t come in the old way. But it will come.

May God bless you on this annual meeting day, and may our entire synod be filled with a sense of God’s vast abundance!