

July 25, 2021 - Pentecost 9

Jesus, this gospel of John's tells us, already knew what he was going to do.

God has long known what God is going to do.

This is the Good News ... the comfort, but also the *challenge* of Jesus' coming into the world.

It's been that way from the beginning. In Genesis, Adam and Eve are given a comfortable place to live and thrive by God.

But human nature is such ... that the first couple of us insisted on their own way.

They couldn't see beyond what they *didn't* have, to appreciate what they were given and what God can do with what God creates and provides.

We see this again in the message from Second Kings. The servant commanded by Elisha saw what looked to him to be not enough.

We hear of it yet again when Peter and Andrew are overwhelmed by the apparent gap between what is needed to feed thousands of people surrounding them and what little food they knew they had.

We experience this time and again in our lives. The times when we doubt, when we feel insecure, when we act out of fear and a mindset of scarcity, declining to trust in God's abundance displayed over and over in the history of creation, redemption and salvation.

We worry when we don't have to and all too often when the going gets tough, we only make it tougher by insisting upon relying on ourselves and refusing to let God be God.

It's painfully hard to admit we aren't in full control of the world we live in. That we are dependent upon God and by the will of God, we are made to be dependent upon one another. Much of the struggle we have had as a society in coping with the COVID-19 pandemic has been exacerbated by this sinful inclination to insist that we know better and that as

individuals, we can choose to live with it however we wish and it will affect no one but ourselves. There are millions of unnecessary deaths around the globe that testify to the reality that this is not true.

But as we are emerging cautiously from the unprecedented impact of the pandemic, we are presented with new opportunities that abound. Indeed, God operates not from the narrow, scarcity-minded vision that humanity has so stubbornly clung to for ages but from an overwhelming abundance and not only the ability, but the *desire* to make so much more from very little.

We are only beginning to understand the ways in which God fashioned this universe but we've learned that everything originated from a tiny little point, so densely rich and keeps expanding wondrously to this day and for quite some time to come. Scientists all over the world are devoting their lives' work to studying and seeking to understand the

as-yet-unseen elementary particles that God uses as building blocks to create.

We should no longer be shocked that God has the ability to provide from what looks to the skeptical mind to be not enough. God has done it before and God is just going to keep at it. Because God has patience that abounds and truly astounds me.

I think of the mind-blowing gaps of time between the Big Bang, the cradle of civilization in Mesopotamia, the era of the prophets in Israel, Jesus' brief years of ministry in Palestine and where we are today. I see that people keep making the same mistakes and I wonder why God doesn't give up on us.

But I know God doesn't. That's just as evident, even more so, than our hard-headed and hard-hearted human nature. So let's witness this again.

God provides. God makes the most of what is and sees and does what we cannot. God doesn't need much to do a lot.

Jesus came to this place that's essentially a backwater, at best a crossroads. He came to be among simple, solid, salt-of-the-earth folks, fishermen, farmers ... and even despised tax-collecting bureaucrats and shunned sex workers. He was born a king who never sat on a throne in a palace in a capital and didn't spend time rubbing elbows with the rich and the powerful.

John emphasizes in this telling of the Gospel message a little detail the others leave out. The composition of the bread that is distributed among the masses of people. It's not wheat but loaves of barley, the common food of the poorest classes of people. His Greek vocabulary choice is the unique *opsarion*, meaning "dried fish," specific food meant to satisfy real hunger. Jesus blesses and multiplies this offering from a child, one who is easily overlooked and usually not treated seriously until coming of age.

By cold, critical calculation, none of this should happen. It's not the way the world works. But it *is* the way the

kingdom of God works and God wants us to see these signs and believe this is — this can be, it is and it will be!

God gives us enough to do the will of God and to be the children of God in the kingdom of Heaven. The challenges we face are not insurmountable, especially if we can meet the challenge to believe God is with us and will sustain us.

We are faced with the challenge of being church together in the midst of transition in so many ways. It's daunting. We have lost a lot, not least of which includes people we loved. We also stand to gain a lot, as we learn what no longer works (if it ever truly did), what we can do better, where we are strong, where we are weak, what we can multiply with God standing with us and what we must let go of to strengthen our focus on the heart of God to be God's beloved community.

We are faced with the challenge as a community of caring for our neighbors when many of them have a tenuous grasp on the ability to call this place home. It isn't only here

but in places like this up and down the West Coast. We are certainly not alone. Sometimes it seems we've sussed out so much of what doesn't work and so little of what does. But God is with us in ministering to the people of Port Townsend and Jefferson County and possibilities for partnerships exist to persist and persevere and improve conditions for the most vulnerable and most in need. I am excited to see what we can do with God to meet this challenge.

We are faced with the challenge of reconnecting.

Whether that's with our neighbors next door, next to us in the pew or even far off, loved ones we have yet to hug and break bread with again, partners in ministry across borders and seas. We awkwardly get reacquainted with resuming these relationships in some ways like they used to be, and we recognize in some ways it won't ever be just as it was before. We wean ourselves off Zoom-for-everything and we give thanks that we learned new ways of connecting that will still serve us in the time to come.

We are faced with the challenge of resisting the urge to do things like they were always done before. When some of those whom Jesus fed saw the signs, they read them the wrong way, as John tells us. They sought to seize power by force, as people have done for millennia, and make him a king like any other. But he showed us a different way, a way to break the cycles of fear and hate, of misplaced trust in temporal (TEM-perl-uhl) systems and structures.

To chart a course with Christ is not to be ensured it's smooth sailing all the way. Far from it. But it is to know, as the disciples learned in that boat so long ago, that the natural fear that arises when the wind gets nasty and the waves get choppy, can be overcome. That it's all right if we don't yet know exactly what we are going to do. Because God does. And in the end, it's going to be good, better than we dare to imagine. Amen and amen.