When I was at the stage in my formation that Steve is in now (the waiting for a stipendiary call stage) and where he’s been (the last assignment to get me across the finish line), I had an opportunity to work with a good friend who was a priest. She and I had become friends when I was in seminary the first time – I was taking my last course toward a degree in Christian education and she was taking her first seminary courses toward a master of divinity and ordination.

After seminary, my friend had been called to be the full-time priest in charge of a congregation that everyone thought was dying. Membership was declining as was the church’s balance sheet. In fact, she was called as a priest in charge rather than a rector because the church thought it would cease to exist within a couple of years and didn’t feel comfortable making the long-term commitment of hiring a rector.

When I joined this church at the end of my formation, my friend had been at the church for four years. One year before that the church was hopeful enough to commit to her as a rector. Rather than burying itself by thinking the little it could offer wasn’t enough, the church had examined its gifts and talents, and discerned and developed a couple of needed ministries. My friend said that every Sunday when the offerings were brought to the altar for a blessing that she silently asked God to make the contributions be enough to meet the church’s needs. Although the gap between what people could afford to pledge and what was needed was wide, God provided. Where humans feared there wasn’t enough, God made abundance.

When Elisha was brought 20 loaves of barley and a few fresh ears of grain, God made it sufficient to feed 100 people, with loaves to spare. When the disciples brought Jesus five loaves and two fish, Jesus made it sufficient to feed more than 5,000 people, with some to spare. When humans feared there wasn’t enough, God made abundance.

You see, the disciples’ problem was that they had grossly underestimated their wealth. They thought all they had was five loaves and two fish. Even though they’d seen Jesus change water into wine and do all those healings, they still didn’t understand. They had more than just five loaves and two fish – they also had Jesus. And in the hands of Jesus, whatever they had grew to abundance.

What about us? It’s human nature to fret about what we lack. Church contributions are falling, and we do the math and we worry. We are having personal challenges and we don’t think we have the strength or the grace or enough of any type of resource to solve these challenges. So we worry. When we worry too much, we’re really making God smaller than God is. We’re limiting God. We need to believe in a bigger God and, if we do that, God will give us more resources than we need. We also need to offer what we have, even if we think it’s too small. If we do that, God will multiply what we have offered.

Kent Hughes, a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, writes, “If the only thing you have to offer is a broken heart, you offer a broken heart. So in a time of grief, the recognition that this is material for sacrifice has been a very great strength for me. Realizing that nothing I have, nothing I am will be refused on the part of Christ, I simply give it to him as the little boy gave Jesus his five loaves and two fishes—with the same feeling of the disciples when they said, “What is the good of that for such a crowd?”[[1]](#endnote-1)

Even if we can only bring a little to Jesus, Jesus will make it enough. As the psalmist writes in praise and thanksgiving to God, “You open wide your hand and satisfy the needs of every living creature.” When we fear that we have too little, God provides for us in abundance.

My friend is in her sixth year of serving the church that expected to close its doors before the end of her third year. By every rational measure, that church ought to be closed or at least without a priest. Not only is the church not closing, it’s thriving. It’s started a building program to build affordable housing for those in the Washington DC area who work full-time (sometimes even in professional jobs) but can’t otherwise live within an hour’s commute of their jobs. It’s partnered with two ethnic congregations, who worship separately most of the time, but who occasionally get together for some wonderfully enriching events. It’s become a place where food and sometimes money are distributed to the poor citywide. It’s membership is growing.

My friend still prays every week to ask God to make the offerings be enough. And every year, God takes whatever the congregation brings and multiplies it. Every year, God gives abundance.

Amen

1. Hughes, R. K. (1999). John: that you may believe (p. 191). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)