My dad loved to cook and was always in the kitchen, trying new recipes and inventing many of his own. He used to drive my mom crazy, chasing her around the house with spoon in hand…”Here Janet, taste this.”

Daddy wasn’t a fancy cook; he simply had a knack for creating the delicious from the ordinary. I remember being a little girl at Thanksgiving time. My grandmother had sent us home with some leftovers along with the turkey carcass. I asked what we were ever going to do with that?! My dad laughed and said, “just you wait and see.”

Well, it was no surprise that the leftover turkey, stuffing and cranberries became sandwiches. But potatoes, stuffing, a little celery and onion, leftover peas, turnip, turkey and gravy also became turkey hash. And that carcass that I thought was so funny, seeming picked over as much as was humanly possible, was boiled with vegetables for stock, removed from the pot, and I was amazed as a nearly full bowl of turkey meat appeared as if from nothing at all. Back into the pot that went, along with whatever hash there was leftover from the last meal, and voila! Turkey soup.

It was the miracle of the never-ending Thanksgiving feast!

My family was not very well off in those days. It was a paycheck-to-paycheck existence for my young parents. So every meal that my folks could squeeze out of another was pretty significant. What seemed like a miracle to me was simply the ingenuity of necessity for them. Those leftovers were indeed a blessing and I realize today how much that abundance created out of seeming scarcity meant to them and to me.

Today we hear John’s version of the feeding of the multitude. Feeding and being fed is a big theme of Jesus’ ministry in the gospels. It’s a story that each of the gospel writers include in one form or another. Maybe they thought it was so important that hearing it only once or twice simply was not enough.

It is the need of the people that draws them to Jesus. John tells us that it is the healing that he was doing that kept the crowd following him, even to the other side of the sea. The crowd was growing every day and now it was the time of the Passover and the faithful were gathering for the holy time, the celebration of God’s freeing the people from slavery in Egypt. Here they come, down the road, more and more. They are coming closer, up and up the mountain, far from the city, far from the markets.

Let’s take a moment and place our selves in the crowd. What are the people around us saying about this Jesus? What is being whispered next to us as we travel? Some say he heals the blind. Is it true that he made that lame man walk again? …..and he did it on the Sabbath? We aren’t sure if that’s daring or just plain crazy.

Wow, we are walking quite a ways from the city, aren’t we? I’m glad I brought a bottle of water and a few figs, but if we go much farther, I may have to turn back. But wait a minute, did that guy over there just say that Jesus changed water to wine at a wedding in Cana of Galilee? That’s quite a feat! We don’t know of any other miracle workers doing that around here. And that man over there, that government official; he is talking about how Jesus cured his son without ever touching the boy.

Let’s keep going just a bit farther along.

There are people from all over and so many of them. There must be 5000 men and look at all the kids and women too! This is the most people we have ever seen in one place before. Farmers and fishermen, people from the hills and the valley towns. And *this is strange*; there are some non-Jews here too.

Look, look! I can see people at the top of the mountain and a man talking with them and laying hands on some of them. That must be Jesus! Let’s try to get closer.

We listen to his teaching. These are things our hearts long to hear:

Blessed are you who are poor

Care for each other as God cares for you

Some are saying he is the Messiah. We dare to dream……Could it be that this is the one we have waited for?

Jesus sees the people, he knows them, and he feels their need; the disciples see more and more and more of them coming, and they know it’s getting late. In all of the other gospels the disciples tell Jesus to send the people away so that they might find food and lodging. In John’s gospel, Jesus turns to Philip and asks *“Where are we to find bread for these people?”* (I can’t help but think that perhaps Philip was the closest one in proximity to Jesus on that day. Lucky Philip.) Somehow Philip has already done the math in his head. It would take six months wages to buy even a meager portion for some, and still there would not be enough.

Andrew has found a boy with 5 loaves of barley bread and two small fish. But he too does the math. That’s 1 fish for 2500 and one loaf for every 1000 men, not to mention the several thousand other women and children present. There is just not enough of loaves and fishes to go around.

That phrase, “Loaves and Fishes”, carries currency far beyond our Christian faith communities. It has become a synonym for sharing that expands beyond the mathematics and bookkeeping of a world that most often measures what is not there. But Jesus didn’t ask for Philip to run the numbers. He was looking to see where Philip would look for an answer. Would he focus on what wasn’t there or ……..on what was, ……..or who was? As long as we look through a clouded lens of what is not possible by the numbers, we may never realize the outlandish possibility of a world with enough to go around. Philip and Andrew didn’t take into account that they needed to factor Jesus into the equation.

*“The problem is not a lack of fish, but a lack of vision. The abundance of God’s presence is hidden in plain view and often obscured by the illusion of scarcity. Abundance is less a resource to be counted and more an interior quality, a presence, a way of being and seeing.”* (Michael Marsh)

It’s like that old story of making stone soup. A traveler comes into a town and finds a woman out working in her yard. He asks if she might have some food to share with him. She says she is sorry but that she does not have enough for her family. He thanks her and asks if he could borrow a pot to make stone soup. He makes a fire and puts water in the pot along with a large stone. Well, the villagers are curious and come to see what is happening with this stranger. The stranger tastes the soup and says to himself how much better it would taste with an onion or some carrots. Immediately a villager goes home and brings an onion and another gives few carrots and adds them to the pot. And so it goes, a little salt, a cabbage, some leftover ham, and before you know it, everyone has some delicious soup to share.

You know, John is the only gospel writer that includes this little boy offering his food, giving all he has to Jesus, as small a portion as it is. I like to think that as Jesus prayed, gave thanks and broke the bread, and those tiny bits of fish and crumbs made their way through the crowd, hearts were opened, and along with that, so were knapsacks, pockets were emptied of figs and nuts and a little bit of water was passed around to share. Jesus multiplied hearts and hands that day along with those loaves and fish, and somehow, in the Kingdom of God, less became more.

The Kingdom of God is present here in Peterborough. The Kingdom is here at All Saints. The signs are there – unexpected community, the breakdown of barriers and boundaries, being drawn beyond the limits of our understanding of what makes family. And if we listen, we can hear the stories people tell about us, stories we tell each other: Healthy snacks, feeding ministry, creating a more welcoming campus, all of the ministries here and in the community where we serve our neighbors; these things are signs of the Kingdom of God breaking through.

You know, when I was telling you about my dad and the never-ending turkey feast, I forgot to mention perhaps the best part for a little girl. Several weeks after Thanksgiving my dad presented me with a gift….the wishbone. He had left it to dry and now came the time to make a wish and pull. I can’t remember if I was the one that ended up with the bigger half, but I’ll never forget how long the turkey lasted that Thanksgiving.

In the feeding of the multitudes, Jesus saw plenty where the disciples saw scarcity. In the Kingdom of God stones become soup, loaves and fishes become baskets of plenty, and small donations of snacks make children’s hearts happy.

May God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in this world, so that we are able, with God’s grace, to do what others claim cannot be done.

Amen