

Pentecost 8, Proper 13  
Church of the Good Shepherd, Silver City, NM

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## **The Kingdom of Abundance**

Two cars were traveling late at night on a mountain road. They came around the same corner of the mountain going opposite directions. Both drivers were caught by surprise, and slowed by tired eyes, they slammed into one another, sending two souls into eternal flight.

One man woke up in hell. Surprisingly, hell had a street of gold running right down the center of it. There was one large building that could be seen a little ways down, with a huge golden door. Not knowing quite what to do, the man approached the door. It swung open at his approach. Inside he saw long tables with souls sitting on benches along them. Between each two facing one another was a large bowl of what smelled like delicious soup. Hunger filled the man's body and he quickly found an open spot to sit down. He noticed that he had a long spoon in one hand, attached, as it were, to his palm. He dipped it in the soup, but for the life of him, the stem was too long for him to bring it to his mouth. It came close, and every time it did the delectable smell just gave him more pangs of hunger. Soon he understood why the others in the room were quarrelling and fighting and moaning. None of them could partake of the feast. Some had taken to smacking one another over the heads with their spoons. Others sat in fuming silence. The man noticed that it was hard to breathe. It was as if the twisted and black attitudes of the souls in the room filled the air with clouds of acrid fire-and-brimstone smoke. Anger flooded him as well, and soon his own mouth spewed the smoke, and he took a swing at his neighbor with the spoon affixed to his hand!

The other man woke up at the pearly gates. St. Peter dutifully found his name on the list and admitted him. Like the other man, he noticed that heaven seemed to contain just one large building. At his approach the large golden doors swung open. He, too, was overcome by hunger at the smell of food. Inside, long tables were lined with long benches and bowls of delicious soup. Each soul had a spoon attached to his hand, just as long as the ones in hell. However, the room was filled with praises and singing, joy and happiness as people partook of the delicious feast. Light seemed to shimmer from the very air in the room, as each one fed his neighbor across the table with the long spoon in his hand.

The difference between heaven and hell is often only a matter of how we see the world. Hell sees oneself at the center of the world. The world is a zero sum equation—if you get lots it leaves little for me. Grab what you can before another gets it. In the end, though

one might sit in incredible wealth, the fact that another has part of the pie is the only concern, and one ends up being desperately poor in the midst of great riches.

Heaven, on the other hand, sees the whole of the community together. The good of everyone is just as important as the good of the individual. Simple acts of service result in an abundance of riches for all.

In Jesus the Kingdom of God (heaven) comes close to us. Today's Gospel lesson illustrates the abundance of the Kingdom. Some theologians would claim that Jesus shamed those who brought lunches into sharing by offering everyone a little boy's lunch. I don't think Jesus shames anyone into anything, And that's not faithful to the text. The text claims that in the sharing of the few riches one has there comes an abundance beyond one's imagining. The Kingdom of God doesn't seem to work on a zero-sum equation. If you get, somehow I get, too. And if you lose you have my company in your loss. Either way, we are both the richer for it.

Three weeks ago 110 people stood before more than 400,000 people in the department of El Paraiso, Honduras. The need is so great! The poverty is grinding. The law enforcement system in the country is collapsing into the hands of thugs. Kids travel 2 hours each way to go to school. This year the bean crop largely failed. We saw hunger like we do not often see. We saw the quiet desperation of farmers whose fields are sand. we saw the attendant rise in internal parasites, infections and other diseases that target weak bodies.

We had in our hands what seemed like a paltry five loaves and two fish: We had five days, \$30,000 worth of medications, and our own hands. We arrived with full suitcases and empty hearts. And when we boarded the plane again we had empty suitcases, yet we were rolling in riches. Here are some of the "leftovers" we gathered:

*Stories by some of those who went along.*

Here are a couple of my own "scraps." An older man in the town of Oropolí was pointed out to me by someone else. When he knew he had my attention he began to gesticulate and utter strange sounds. He moved his hands down over his knees, and along his sides. They told me, "He's mute, he can't talk." We moved him to the head of the line.

A young mother brought in her 4-day old boy whose cleft palate made one opening of his left nostril and his mouth. A patient and caring Physician's Assistant helped her learn to feed the baby with a syringe and catheter, Then lovingly and proudly held the baby for pictures, constantly cooing about how gorgeous he was—and there wasn't a hint of

condescension in her voice.

On Tuesday we gathered under a makeshift awning, 50 or so of us. Santos picked up a guitar began singing, "Yo tengo fe que todo cambiará." It's a song about hope that says, "I have faith that all will change." In that context I baptized my goddaughter's daughter. In a funny sort of way I felt like I have family there. Somehow the distance in geography and wealth didn't matter. I was not their guest, I was a beloved family member. The distances collapsed under the umbrella of the Kingdom of God. There was an abundance of love for all!

Where is your sense of scarcity? Where is the jealousy, the envy and the loss? Consider the riches of the Kingdom. Turn your spoon toward another's open mouth, and you, too, will be fed.