

In the name of God, and of God's Son, and of God's Holy Spirit. Amen.

We are coming to the time of the year where, in the Northern Hemisphere, we can think about harvests. In our reading from the Second Kings, we get a snippet of the life of Elisha, a renowned prophet of God. A man comes from the nearby countryside to present the first fruits of his grain harvest; it was one of the observances commanded through Moses to the Hebrew people. In this harvest festival, the people were commanded to bring the best of the first crops from their fields to the altar as a gift to God.

This man has fulfilled what was expected of him; but then the prophet Elisha turns to his servant and asks *him* to do something he didn't expect: feed the people who have gathered around the place where Elisha is. In this section of Second Kings we have seen Elisha acting on behalf of people in distress and loss. Elisha has a knack for providing plenty out of very little. And he turns to his servant and tells him to feed everybody he sees with just this one man's offering. The servant is truly taken aback; this offering would never feed the hundred people he sees around him. He would be insulting those people by trying to feed them all with so little. But

Elisha shows him that what is given to God returns in plenty. He sets the offering before the people, they eat their fill and there is food left over.

The readings we have today show God working with what little we have to accomplish what we didn't think possible. God, through the prophet Elisha, works with what people have; the widow who has only a little oil; the company of prophets in the midst of famine who try to feed themselves by gathering wild plants and herbs from the countryside; and taking this one man's single offering and feeding a hundred people with it. And God provides not just enough to get by, but enough so that entire communities are blessed through the gifts of a few. The writer of Ephesians sums this work up, saying that God, "at work within us is able to accomplish *abundantly* far more than all we can ask or imagine."

In our passage from Second Kings, and in the Gospel of John's telling of the feeding of the multitude, God's abundant work within individuals and communities involves someone bringing before God whatever they possess at that moment as an offering to God. It isn't a tremendous offering; it is, in fact, very little, and often unrecognized as being worth giving. But whether it is a widow's tiny store of oil, or a potful of herbs, or

the required offering of grain at harvest time, or five barley loaves and two fish, when we offer to God the gifts within us, God can work with those gifts to accomplish abundantly the vision God has for us as individuals, as communities, and for the renewal of the world. First, the need is recognized, or spoken aloud; then time is taken to see what we have within our reach, within ourselves; and the difficulty for us sometimes is seeing what we have within ourselves with the same imagination that God has. We look far and wide for something neon-lit, spectacular, with all the bells and whistles; we try to plan for every scenario we might encounter because we want what we do to go as perfectly as possible and achieve the maximum result. And so we often overlook in ourselves the humble clay that God can shape into the creation of God's choosing.

God doesn't ask for spectacular, or perfect, or the maximum. God asks for our real selves, our imperfect selves, our hungry, lacking selves. And God asks us to offer ourselves as a first-fruit - not to give to God whatever remains of us that are left after we've tried to meet the world's demands. What we give to God is returned to us in abundance; when we give ourselves to God, in God's hands we are remade, we are grown, we are re-created in such a way that within ourselves we find enough to sustain

us; and we are no longer in debt to what little the world has to offer, but instead overflowing with what God has to give to us, and to our communities.

“I pray that, according to the riches of God’s glory, God may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through God’s Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” These words written to the Ephesians are a reminder of the abundance that God can make real within us; this offering of ourselves to God, and God’s return to us of ourselves filled with God’s spirit, is what satisfies our truest hunger. May we with hope, and with joy, and with gratitude declare to God what little we have and give our selves into God’s hands so that God may in turn work within us to accomplish much more than we could have ever asked or imagine. Amen.