

A story like this reminds me of when I was little and we would visit my cousin's house.

They were a few blocks away from us in the small Texas town where we all lived.

I had two cousins who were a few years older than me.

My brother David was another three years younger.

Douglas was either in high school or college when we were little -

and Larry was closer to our ages – about three years older than I.

The point is that there were toys in their houses that they did not play with any more  
and were there to be discovered.

When we would go to visit either of their houses – my brother and I would make our way back  
through what seemed like rooms and rooms – closets into old toy boxes –  
to see what we could find.

It was mysterious and exciting.

We must have found something new each visit –  
or at least found things to play with that we had not seen in a while.

Each visit was an adventure.

That's the thing about children.

They can have adventures with things we adults take for granted –  
like boxes in grandma's attic - or at our cousin's house.

There is always the chance of finding something you did not see last time.

Stories are like that – too – like old toy boxes – boxes in Grandma's attic.

Treasure chests that contain so much more than the plot.

But we have to open them as a child does -  
with an open heart and a bit of curiosity.

When you have heard a story over and over –  
then often one phrase is enough to remind you of the rest of it.

But does it really?

Or is there more that God – the ultimate storyteller – has to say to us?

Today's story of the loaves and fishes is certainly that way.

The plot is not new. We know how the story will end.

Actually the story has already been told before -  
with minor variation - some 800 years earlier in 2 Kings.

Most of us probably do not know that.

The prophet Elisha - told his disciples to feed a group of people –  
against their insistence that it would not work.

That it – it would not work to feed a large group of people  
with what they perceived was not enough food.

And yet – everyone was filled and there was food left over.

And now – the feeding of 5,000 with five loaves and two fish.

What we learn from the story depends on what we allow ourselves to see in it.

We can be blasé – and think we already know everything there is to know.

Or – we can bring a sense of awe over the power that Jesus had.

We can notice the compassion that he had for the people who were hungry.

We can notice the young boy who was willing to share what he had in his basket.

Or, we can identify with the skeptical disciples.

They were like Elisha's disciples many years earlier – who were convinced it would not work.

Who do you identify with?

If we come to the story thinking we already know it all and have little to gain -  
then we will probably prove ourselves correct - a self-fulfilling prophesy.

We know that Jesus had to have had an awesome presence and power.

But - we do not really know how he used that power.

People call it miraculous.

Did he multiply the bread and the fish?

Or - did he open the hearts of a whole lot of people – to share what they had?

Multiplying loaves and fish would be miraculous -  
but opening the hearts of people who are accustomed to looking out primarily for themselves -  
would seem to be an even larger miracle.

If Jesus was multiplying loaves of bread and fishes -  
they would cooperate because he would have power over these objects.

But people – they can refuse to cooperate.

People often close their hearts and live their lives that way.

So – surely the opening of hearts would be the bigger feat.

*"Like Boxes in Grandma's Attic"* – based on John 6:1-21  
Aspen Community UMC  
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I'll shift a little to today – and wonder.  
Perhaps there is some effort to open hearts  
in the debates in Congress – and between Congress and the White House -  
about how to provide health care in this country.  
Because - the questions that we invariably hear -  
and the questions we ask ourselves are things like this:

What if it takes me longer to see a doctor?  
What if I have to wait longer for an x-ray or an MRI?  
Or what if I – I – I – am inconvenienced – in some way?  
What's it going to cost?

I am not implying that it is not appropriate to look out for one's own needs -  
but it is when in the same breath – we do not have the compassion -  
to try and balance our own needs – with the needs of the bigger body – everyone else too.

Well – back to the story.

The disciples were naysayers here.  
And when the story was told in 2 Kings - the disciples of Elisha were naysayers.

I wonder what that was about?

I wonder if they did not want to be inconvenienced.  
They did not want anything to compromise their own plans for a meal -  
with each other at the end of a long day of managing a crowd.

Well, it is something to think about.



Back to the young boy with a small lunch basket with some bread and some fish -  
It seems unlikely that his lunch basket was pried away from him by the disciples.

So – if that is not the case – we can assume  
that he picked up on the lesson of compassion from Jesus – rather quickly.

This message is about identifying with him – the young boy who had a lunch basket.  
Jesus may have been teaching compassion – not magically multiplying loaves and fishes.

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If the lesson is about compassion -  
and I believe it is – let's think about where we might apply that today in our lives.

Is there any way we can identify with the crowd in the story?

Who were they?

Perhaps - like us - they were a group of people in search of more meaning for their lives.

If not – why would they be chasing Jesus into the middle of nowhere to listen  
to what he had to say?

And – if we had gone out for a day to hear someone –  
just like we do when we set out on a hike around here – like you might do this afternoon -  
wouldn't you take some water and at least a little something to eat?  
Most of us would – but there would be some who did not think of it – or perhaps did not have it.

It seems to me that in sharing what most of the people had brought -  
there was plenty for all.

That may be the lesson of compassion Jesus was teaching that day.  
And when we give all our attention to whether Jesus multiplied – or cloned – loaves and fishes -  
we remove ourselves from all responsibility.

That may be convenient – but probably not what Jesus had in mind.

Well – this is what I find today as I go back into the "grandma's attic"  
with a curious mind - to a story that we've heard many times.  
May we all become sharers of the loaves and fishes we packed -  
or someone packed for us.

Amen.