

## ***Surprising Abundance from a Meager Offering***

Ken Wilson, 8.5.18

*Or, When the Meager-Beaver Pays a Visit, Maybe There's Hope*

Julia has a cottage. I like having a wife with a cottage. Last few years, a **meager patch of milkweed** outside cottage; **butterflies were scarce**. Global trend, big problem 1/3 food supply depends on fertilization by butterflies, and butterflies depend on milkweed. The Meager-Beaver has been messing with the Milkweed. So I was surprised last week to see this milkweed patch doubled in size & vitality, swarming with monarchs. **Abundance of this year was hidden in meagerness of last year**

**Must have been a catalyst for that transformation**—some factor added to equation: less moisture, more sun, maybe a do-gooder biologist-neighbor came by to fertilize that patch.

Jesus did “abundance out of meagerness” signs. Not some-thing from nothing, but a **lot out of an offered little**. John 6: *Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee...A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?”*

Rest of story is pretty great. Jesus gives thanks for bread and fish, then starts giving it away, and it **multiplies in the giving**. When it's done, the crowd is bread-gorged—asking for the check and the Styrofoam take home box with no room for desert.

The word “Bible” means “books”—so it's a collection of different writings. 2 main commonly called OT (Laws of Moses, Wisdom Writings, Prophets) and NT. By now that's a little misleading because the OT is just a little older than the NT. Maybe it should now be called the Old and the Older Books.

Common for Gentiles (non-Jews) to think the New Testament is so much more fun than the Jewish Old Testament. Forgetting all the “books” are Jewish writings spanning 600 yrs of Jewish history (time of Babylonian exile 500 BC, to about 100 CE)

Jesus and disciples, were Jewish of course, and they knew the stories of their people. When Jesus said, ***“Where can we get enough bread to feed this mob? ...he*** was triggering their memory of **Elisha**, the prophet who succeeded **Elijah**. They already had Elisha and Elijah on their minds, big time.

Who was Elisha? Successor to Elijah. And people of Jesus’ time expected an Elijah-figure to appear in advance of Messiah. **Jesus said John/Baptist was that Elijah figure.** Which made Jesus an **Elisha-figure**, if you’re following plot. **Sonny Liston** followed by **Muhammad Ali/Elvis followed by Beatles! Elijah followed by Elisha! John/Baptist** followed by **Jesus!** Exciting times when something big followed by something bigger.

What kind of signs did Elisha perform? **He received meager offerings and turned them into an abundance.** Elisha, long before Jesus, had a big crowd to feed and only 12 small barley loaves (each size of dinner roll). As he gave them away, they multiplied, everyone filled up with leftovers.

When it says, ***“Jesus said this to test them.”*** It wasn’t like asking the rich politician how much a gallon of milk costs. (Where can we get enough bread for this crowd? Costco?)

The right answer was, “Oh my gosh are you going to do what Elisha did?” Peter’s response ***“Ah...there’s a boy over there with 5 loaves and 2 fishes...”*** was his sly way of egging Jesus on. ***Do it! Now’s the time! Go for it! Pull an Elisha!***

Hits us right where we live: **Fear** tells us we live in a world of **scarcity**—we fear there’s never enough (time, money, people who love us). Fear turns life into a **competition**—we feel like 12 kids eyeing a pie with 8 pieces. **Faith, the opposite of fear, sees abundance hidden in meagerness.**

Elisha’s barley loaves last in a sequence of scarcity-into-abundance signs. **Widow** on last jar of oil offers it and Elisha multiplies it. Ends with multiplied barely loaves. Same message: offer your meager portion and see what happens when **divine catalyst** is added.

**An abundance out of meagerness triggered by a catalyst.**

Foosball at Wilson holidays. Grace in Middle School—can barely keep up. But I watch over course of 10 minutes, as her Uncle Kit, best foosball player in family,

starts praising her play as she's playing—and she got her mojo multiplied and before our eyes her game blossomed. Uncle Kit was the catalyst.

Over course of a lifetime we move from meagerness into abundance and back again – back & forth, one phase, then another. Had a house in A2 filled at one time with 5 kids. Over a single year, last of kids gone, I'm a new widower rattling around in that big house like a single penny in penny jar.

What Elisha stories add to feeding of 5,000 story is **bleak feeling** we have in **scarcity phase**. How we feel when the Meager Beaver has been gnawing away at our supply trees. Feeding of 5,000 told thru lens of disciples anxious about size of crowd, how to feed them. The story of the widow on her last jar of oil, gives a better picture of how bleak we can feel in meagerness phase. **2 Kings 4**

Last Sunday, went to a little Episcopal Church Up North in a town called **DeTour**. A town named “DeTour” does not have the same “Inflated Self-Esteem” of town like Ann Arbor. To preserve a sense of dignity, town name is spelled DeTour. I love you and feel that you are my people. But in a different way these people felt like my people too .... Because they were OLD. Average age 75. (Made me feel young by comparison)

Able to say there what I've never said here: “Many of us in this sacred space are in the **Back-9** of life. Our **Next Big Transition** isn't going off to college, starting a career. Our NBT is **Mother of All Transitions**. I didn't realize how long it can l-o-o-m. Since my first wife died, I think of my own death quite frequently—once a day at least.” Whole place—White Episcopal mind you! nodding heads—they were picking up what I was laying down.

Oceana started referring to our reconstituted family as “**our gross little family**.” Came together in wake of loss: Oceana lost her dad too soon, Julia her first husband, me, my first wife. I knew I was accepted as Oceana's new step-dad as I'm leaving one day and heard her call out to me in her Oceana way: *Don't die Mr. Ken!* (All gonna die—probably not today)

But as I'm here this Sunday, with you, my real home church, I realize how many of you are in unenviable position of having known different but very significant losses, at a younger age. Losses that normally only accrue with age, not circumstance: losses of family, friends, beloved communities.

Fact we've done this before—cycled back & forth between abundance & scarcity—  
**doesn't mean the sense of meagerness isn't acute whenever it comes around**  
again. Each time we feel **vulnerable**. Each time we're tempted to wonder—*maybe*  
***scarcity gets the last word after all***

So it is, week after week, we come to this communion table, this altar, offering  
**ourselves** as though it is our last jar of oil.

**In same way, Jesus offered himself to God.** It may **seem** an **impressive** offering to us, but it may have **seemed meager** to him at time. At time of his death, his movement in shambles—crowds had shrunk, 12 main leaders scattered, Peter, main leader, had denied him publically. Prospects for the Jesus revolution were bleak.

In end, Jesus offered what he had—his vulnerable, power-less, nearly naked and dying self...the Elisha figure became the widow on her last jar of oil...and he offered it, in hopes it too would be catalyzed by the God of Abundance, God of Resurrection.

Wisdom of age is knowing we can't take any of our abundance with us in the  
Mother of All Transitions.

In end, we only really have our vulnerable selves to offer. But if **Jesus** is any sign to us at all, he is as sign that **this is enough** for the god of resurrection to work with.

As we receive the bread of communion soon, in one gesture we do two things—  
receive his offering and offer ourselves in return. With the eyes of faith, let's see the hidden abundance in each of these offerings today.

QUIET REFLECTION

## **John 6**

Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

## **2 Kings**

Elisha and the Widow's Oil

**4** Now the wife of a member of the company of prophets<sup>[a]</sup> cried to Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead; and you know that your servant feared the LORD, but a creditor has come to take my two children as slaves." **2** Elisha said to her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?" She answered, "Your servant has nothing in the house, except a jar of oil." **3** He said, "Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbors, empty vessels and not just a few. **4** Then go in, and shut the door behind you and your children, and start pouring

into all these vessels; when each is full, set it aside.”<sup>5</sup> So she left him and shut the door behind her and her children; they kept bringing vessels to her, and she kept pouring.<sup>6</sup> When the vessels were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another vessel.” But he said to her, “There are no more.” Then the oil stopped flowing.<sup>7</sup> She came and told the man of God, and he said, “Go sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your children can live on the rest.”

#### Elisha Raises the Shunammite’s Son

<sup>8</sup> One day Elisha was passing through Shunem, where a wealthy woman lived, who urged him to have a meal. So whenever he passed that way, he would stop there for a meal.<sup>9</sup> She said to her husband, “Look, I am sure that this man who regularly passes our way is a holy man of God.<sup>10</sup> Let us make a small roof chamber with walls, and put there for him a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp, so that he can stay there whenever he comes to us.”

<sup>11</sup> One day when he came there, he went up to the chamber and lay down there.<sup>12</sup> He said to his servant Gehazi, “Call the Shunammite woman.” When he had called her, she stood before him.<sup>13</sup> He said to him, “Say to her, Since you have taken all this trouble for us, what may be done for you? Would you have a word spoken on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army?” She answered, “I live among my own people.”<sup>14</sup> He said, “What then may be done for her?” Gehazi answered, “Well, she has no son, and her husband is old.”<sup>15</sup> He said, “Call her.” When he had called her, she stood at the door.<sup>16</sup> He said, “At this season, in due time, you shall embrace a son.” She replied, “No, my lord, O man of God; do not deceive your servant.”

<sup>17</sup> The woman conceived and bore a son at that season, in due time, as Elisha had declared to her.

<sup>18</sup> When the child was older, he went out one day to his father among the reapers.<sup>19</sup> He complained to his father, “Oh, my head, my head!” The father said to his servant, “Carry him to his mother.”<sup>20</sup> He carried him and brought him to his mother; the child sat on her lap until noon, and he died.<sup>21</sup> She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, closed the door on him, and left.<sup>22</sup> Then she called to her husband, and said, “Send me one of the servants and one of the donkeys, so that I may quickly go to the man of God and come back again.”<sup>23</sup> He said, “Why go to him today? It is neither new moon nor sabbath.” She said, “It will be all right.”<sup>24</sup> Then she saddled the donkey and said to her servant, “Urge the animal on; do not hold back for me unless I tell you.”<sup>25</sup> So she set out, and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel.

When the man of God saw her coming, he said to Gehazi his servant, “Look, there is the Shunammite woman; <sup>26</sup> run at once to meet her, and say to her, Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is the child all right?” She answered, “It is all right.”<sup>27</sup> When she came to the man of God at the mountain, she caught hold of his feet. Gehazi approached to push her away. But the man of God said, “Let her alone, for she is in bitter distress; the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me.”<sup>28</sup> Then she said, “Did I ask my lord for a son? Did I not say, Do not mislead me?”<sup>29</sup> He said to Gehazi, “Gird up your loins, and take my staff in your hand, and go. If you meet anyone, give no greeting, and if anyone greets you, do not answer; and lay my staff on the face of the child.”<sup>30</sup> Then the mother of the child said, “As

the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave without you.” So he rose up and followed her. <sup>31</sup> Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the face of the child, but there was no sound or sign of life. He came back to meet him and told him, “The child has not awakened.”

<sup>32</sup> When Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed. <sup>33</sup> So he went in and closed the door on the two of them, and prayed to the LORD. <sup>34</sup> Then he got up on the bed<sup>[b]</sup> and lay upon the child, putting his mouth upon his mouth, his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and while he lay bent over him, the flesh of the child became warm. <sup>35</sup> He got down, walked once to and fro in the room, then got up again and bent over him; the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. <sup>36</sup> Elisha<sup>[c]</sup> summoned Gehazi and said, “Call the Shunammite woman.” So he called her. When she came to him, he said, “Take your son.” <sup>37</sup> She came and fell at his feet, bowing to the ground; then she took her son and left.

#### Elisha Purifies the Pot of Stew

<sup>38</sup> When Elisha returned to Gilgal, there was a famine in the land. As the company of prophets was<sup>[d]</sup> sitting before him, he said to his servant, “Put the large pot on, and make some stew for the company of prophets.”<sup>[e]</sup> <sup>39</sup> One of them went out into the field to gather herbs; he found a wild vine and gathered from it a lapful of wild gourds, and came and cut them up into the pot of stew, not knowing what they were. <sup>40</sup> They served some for the men to eat. But while they were eating the stew, they cried out, “O man of God, there is death in the pot!” They could not eat it. <sup>41</sup> He said, “Then bring some flour.” He threw it into the pot, and said, “Serve the people and let them eat.” And there was nothing harmful in the pot.

#### Elisha Feeds One Hundred Men

<sup>42</sup> A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, “Give it to the people and let them eat.” <sup>43</sup> But his servant said, “How can I set this before a hundred people?” So he repeated, “Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the LORD, ‘They shall eat and have some left.’” <sup>44</sup> He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the LORD.