Dr. Suzanne Allen

First UMC

Springboro, Ohio

November 9, 2015

Series: “The Gratitude Path”

Message: “More Than Enough”

Scripture: John 6:1-11

 Today we begin a new worship series called “The Gratitude Path.” It is an opportunity to help prepare our hearts and our heads for this season of thanksgiving.

 In our nation, in our community, and in our lives we are so blessed with freedoms, with information and education and opportunities, and with material resources. And while we are grateful and we know we should be filled with thanksgiving, often we find ourselves taking what we have for granted and feeling more worried, disappointed, disillusioned, mopey than thankful.

 We also have a tendency to think we should give thanks when everything is good. And then that we shouldn’t give thanks when things aren’t good or just so. But if it’s true that we often take what we have for granted, especially when we have so much, and focus on the negative rather than all of the good things and feeling thankful, then honestly, we mostly end up not giving thanks very often.

 But if we look at how Jesus did things and follow his way, the path of gratitude, we find that he did things differently. We see this very clearly as we look at our scripture for today in John 6. We could call this Jesus’ most famous miracle: the feeding of the 5,000 men (plus women and children according to the other gospel writers). It is the only miracle recorded in all four gospels.

 We can look at this story from two perspectives. We can look at it according to the path of scarcity or the path of gratitude.

 If we were there, we might be like the disciples. They were only being realistic, practical. But without knowing it, they were charging boldly down the path of scarcity, the path of not enough.

 “Jesus, you’ve been here long enough. This was supposed to be your day off. We all need a break. Let’s call it a day.”

 But Jesus was different. He won’t go down that path. His way is the way of gratitude that leads to abundance.

 It is his abundance of compassion that moves him to stay there with the crowds in the first place. His compassion is a reflection of God’s compassion. God’s compassion is abundant, unending, never failing. It is always enough.

 This is where our gratitude and sense of abundance begins. As Jesus has compassion on us and forgives us, it helps us reset our course on the path of gratitude. We realize that Jesus is enough. He is more than enough. In him we are so blessed that we can live each day with gratitude regardless of the other things going on in life.

 It’s the opposite of the path of scarcity. As we follow that path, we try so hard. And then we try harder, but it is never enough. But with the gratitude path we walk with Jesus and realize that there is an abundance of grace and compassion and love. It is always enough. It is more than enough.

 When we choose to walk on this path, beginning in gratitude and abundance, we realize that so much more is possible. We have so much abundance to enjoy and to share. Gratitude begins to fill every part of us.

 It’s a hard lesson to learn. I have to learn it and relearn it all this time. The disciples are learning it too. It’s not easy.

 Jesus stays with the crowds, and teaches them and heals them spiritually and physically. And then he makes the suggestion that they all should be fed. Philip responds so practically. We couldn’t afford that! Even if we could, there are thousands of people here. It would take months of coordinating and planning to feed that many people—even for an event planner today.

 Perhaps Andrew says it as a joke. Perhaps he mentions it to show how little they really have. Jesus, here is one boys’ lunch—5 loaves and two fish. They are just crumbs in comparison with what is needed.

 But Jesus isn’t practical. He isn’t worried. He isn’t cynical. He is grateful for what is offered. His way is different. He sees the resources that are there.

 He takes this one lunch and gives thanks over what seems to be scarcity. Through his gratitude to God, this small amount is transformed into more than enough for the whole crowd. Everyone eats and there is still some left. There is more than they even started with. This is a picture of the Gratitude Path.

 So what would it look like if we followed Jesus’ example? What if we give thanks over what we have, even when it seems like a pitiful amount, even when our practical side tells us to worry and fret, even when it seems like a bad situation? What if we give thanks and trust that when Jesus is there we will always have more than enough?

 When we choose to live on this path of gratitude, everything changes. We see what we have rather than what we don’t have. We give and share out of our abundance rather than clinging to what we have in scarcity, hoarding it for ourselves in case we might need it one day when there isn’t enough.

 We trust God in all things, with all things, giving thanks in all things regardless of the circumstances.

 Sometimes when we think of a miracle story, we only think of God’s role in it. But often what a miracle does is changes us and opens us up to God’s working in and through us. Janet Hunt gives us another way to think of the miracle of abundance in this story: “Others insist it would be as much of a miracle if, following a child’s example, everyone simply put on the table what they had brought—this seeing to it that everyone’s hunger was satisfied. In a world where we are all to quick to hold tight to what is ‘ours’ and awfully slow to share, the latter would seem to be as amazing even as any.”

 The path of gratitude leads to abundance. Trusting in that continued abundance leads to generosity.

 I have seen that in our congregation and I am grateful to you for your generosity. We put a wagon in the hallway with Pete the Cat on it and asked you to help children in Dayton who need shoes. 90 pairs appeared. We pass the envelope for Jack’s trip to Nicaragua and he can take all sorts of supplies and make a donation to the school where they will be working on behalf of our church. We ask you to bring in food for funeral meals and to pray for friends and neighbors and what we find is when everyone does their part, there is a miracle of abundance. There is more than enough.

 Each year we set the general church budget on faith. And each year you are faithful. Each person gives as God is leading them and as a mark of faith, and we always have enough, a miracle of abundance. We are stepping out in faith again this year as we ask you to support the ministries of our church through the general budget. And alongside of it we’re asking you to support the first steps campaign to pay off our existing debt and do some renovations in the sanctuary to help with overflow services and future growth. We are choosing to follow Jesus down the path of gratitude trusting that we will experience a miracle of abundance.

 I hope that you will join us on this path of gratitude. I look forward to celebrating a miracle of abundance with you.