

Sermon by Rev. Allison J. Beaulieu  
Glenshaw Presbyterian Church  
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## Super Size Me

Before I begin this sermon, I must give a little disclaimer. It probably isn't necessary, but I'm going to say it anyway. I know many of you have noticed that in the last nine months, my sermons have been saturated with stories about my new role as a mom and my son Gus. There are a few reasons why I include these stories. First of all, I have to take advantage of telling Gus stories now before Gus becomes aware that I am talking about him from the pulpit. I know the Gus stories will be all over when he becomes a teenager and doesn't want anyone involved in his business. The second reason is because I write sermons from where I am on my journey of faith. This, I think, is what makes a preacher authentic and honest and so I try to do that with each sermon I write. And, I tell you this very honestly, being a mom is teaching me so much about being a Christian. As I try my best to become a better follower of Christ, I think I am becoming a better mom. And so my most profound divine revelations lately have been in this context, so that is where I extract my stories. Yes these stories are personal, but they make me honest, and I am a firm believer that Christ can speak through the stories of our lives. It is my hope and prayer that the Holy Spirit moves through these stories and speaks to you, making you more vigilant of the wonderful, ordinary ways in which we are touched by God. And with that, let us pray: *O God may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our rock and our redeemer. Amen.*

I want to tell you a story about Camille Thompson. About a month ago, Keith, Gus, and I took a cruise (and how I have wished I was back on that cruise!). Keith and I had packed a tote bag full of Gus supplies: diapers, wipes, cheerios, bottles, and tons of toys to keep him occupied on the plane. We had made three bottles of formula for the whole journey, because we couldn't take the formula powder in our carry-on for security purposes. So, we packed the container of formula in our large suitcases, which we checked. When we got to Florida, we gave our large suitcases to the cruise staff who told

us that the suitcases would be sent to our rooms and we'd receive them in about two hours. We had one bottle left, so I gave Gus the bottle and figured, we would have our suitcases before he would get hungry again and then have the formula to make another bottle. I make mistakes as a parent everyday but this was a really stupid one. Sometimes I just want to paint a sign on my forehead that says, "First Time Mom". That would explain a lot, I think. So Gus began to get hungry and our suitcases, of course, were not delivered to our cabin yet. We waited a little longer, still no suitcases and one cranky Gus. But, then Gus's cry started to change from a fussy whimper to an all-out cry. That's when, as a mom, you go into high-gear. I found some pleasant looking cruise staff on our deck and asked politely: when will we receive our suitcases because my baby is hungry and we need the formula. The staff member looked at me and he said, "Ma'm just be patient. They are coming." What I wanted to say was "Then you can take my screaming baby and see how patient you can be". But, I was polite and thanked him for his time. As minutes rolled by like molasses and Gus's cries got more and more wanting and piercing, I started to feel sick on my stomach. My baby was hungry and I couldn't do anything about it. It was an awful feeling. It made me think about all those women in impoverished areas who have to watch their children go hungry. It feels so awful not to be able to provide for your baby. Then I saw Camille Thompson. She was pushing a cart of suitcases around. I stopped her and looked for our suitcases. They were not on her cart. I explained the whole situation. She took one look at Gus and abandoned her cart to search for our suitcases. She made us stand in the hallway and after a few minutes, she emerged with our suitcases. What an amazing sight that was! I had tears in my eyes. I could finally satisfy my baby's hunger. In my cruise evaluation, I remember writing, "Camille Thompson is a star."

In Matthew 14, we run into some hungry people, don't we? This story runs on the coat-tails of the story of the death of John the Baptist. John, who is a good friend of Jesus, has been killed and Jesus wants to withdraw from the crowds. But the crowds follow him. They are drawn to Jesus because they are so enthralled by the miracles and healings he is performing. These people have been following Jesus all day and they become hungry. The disciples are the first to realize this deep hunger and ask Jesus to send them away so that they can get some food.

Let me ask you a question, “Are you hungry?” Now, you know hungry is a loaded word, isn’t it? It typically means discomfort or pain caused by a profound lack of food. I’m sure the crowds following Jesus that day were hungry in that sense. They probably hadn’t eaten all day. Maybe you are physically hungry right now, I don’t know. But, hungry can also mean a strong desire or need for something other than food. For example, someone who lives in a war-torn nation might be hungry for peace. A person who was wronged by someone or something might be hungry for justice. A person who has been separated from their friends and family might be hungry for love. Mother Theresa once wrote, “Being unwanted, unloved, uncared for, forgotten by everybody, I think that is a much greater hunger, a much greater poverty than the person who has nothing to eat.” We hunger for peace, for justice, for love, for healing, for understanding, for God. If we look deep inside ourselves, all of us could probably find a hollow spot in our soul where we crave something to fill it. Each of us, in our own way, is like little Oliver in *Oliver Twist*, impoverished, vulnerable, and scared holding up a bowl for food. Will this bowl....will this hole in the soul....ever be filled?

Starving for food, the disciples find practically nothing—five small loaves of bread and two measly fish. What good is that going to do when you’re feeding five thousand? Jesus asked the disciples to bring him what they had. They do so, reluctantly. As they walk up to Jesus I can hear them saying, “I told him to send them home; I don’t know why he doesn’t listen to us sometimes.” But then Jesus creates a miracle—he takes the loaves and the fish, and he looks up to heaven and blesses it, and then he gives it to his disciples. From those lousy five loaves and two fish, Jesus feeds the entire crowd—5,000 to be exact, and that doesn’t even include women and children! Everyone is able to eat and their hunger is satisfied....satisfied through God’s abundance....God’s abundant grace.

When we have a hunger, which most of us probably do, I think we take it upon ourselves to fill. We live in an extravagant world and therefore, to fill our hunger, we take from the world’s extravagance. Let me give you an example. Walter Brueggeman, a renowned Old Testament scholar, was talking about some of his friends who have a four year old son. He writes, “Recently the mother told me that she was about to make a crucial decision. She had to get her son into the right kindergarten because if she didn’t,

then he wouldn't get into the right prep school. And that would mean not being able to get into Davidson College. And if he didn't go to school there he wouldn't be connected to the bankers in Charlotte and be able to get the kind of job where he would make a lot of money.” He continues, “My friends' story is a kind of a parable of our notion that we must position ourselves because we must achieve, and build our own lives. According to the Nike Shoes, whoever has the most shoes when he dies wins. The Nike story says there are no gifts to be given because there's no giver. We end up only with whatever we manage to get for ourselves.”

Brueggeman is saying that we rely on our own resources, our own devices, our own connections to provide for ourselves. In a way, this is unavoidable; we must work to make a living. But like the Rolling Stones sing, “You can't always get what you want.” That is, you can't always get what you want by your own means. We need to turn to God...to God's abundance to satisfy our soul's hunger. And we know that God does not give as the world gives. God's abundance is nothing you can hold in your hand, it is everything you can hold in your heart.

In every biblical passage, we learn something about ourselves and then we learn something that we must do. In Matthew 14, we learn that we are starving people, in need of spiritual nourishment. And that nourishment can only come from God's abundance which is lavished upon us, like the rain that has saturated our area this week. We also discover that we are meant to share God's abundance with one another. When the disciples come to Jesus and tell him that the crowds are hungry, Jesus gives them a command and that is this: YOU give them something to eat. Of course, we know how the story goes and the disciples protest and show him their measly bread and fish. But, do you remember what Jesus does with the bread and fish after he blesses it? He gives it to the *disciples* and then the *disciples* give it to the crowds.

We are called to share God's extravagance. We are commissioned to meet our neighbor's hunger with abundance—the abundance of Christ, who has given us grace upon grace. Through the Holy Spirit, we have the power to satisfy each other's hunger. That's an amazing and beautiful thing. Let me tell you how beautiful it is.

A few months ago, there was a devastating earthquake in China. Most of you have probably heard about this on the news. Thousands of people died in this

earthquake. The news showed pictures of people standing in front of crumbled building. People were covered in dust and soot and dirt. After the earthquake the ground rested like a sleeping lion. People were anxious and scared that it would awake again. In that stillness, a woman heard a baby cry. At first, she thought it was her own infant, but she realized that couldn't possibly be the case. She left her baby at home with its father so that she could run some errands. So she followed the sound of the wanting, piercing cry. She removed some of the wreckage and underneath, she found a small baby lying next to its mother. The mother was dead. She looked at the baby all covered in dust and ash. And being a mother itself, she knew that cry. The cry of hunger. She looked once more at the dead mother as if by some divine intervention she could hear her desperate plea. And so she picked the child up, held him in her arms, and slowly brought him up to her breast. Amen.