

SERMON KRIJTBURG SATURDAY, JULY 24TH 2021
on 2 Kings 4, 42 – 44 and John 6, 1 – 15
Gregory Brenninkmeijer SJ

It sometimes happens, my dear friends. Someone cracks a joke and everyone bursts out laughing. But I don't get it. I do not see what's so funny. I just miss the point. And then one of the group still laughing starts to explain the joke to me. That makes things worse. You cannot explain a joke. You ruin the joke trying to explain it. It doesn't work. You either get it or you don't.

The same is true with the readings we just heard. They either hit you or they don't make sense. But in any case do not try to explain what happened when Elisha fed his hundred men with some few pieces of bread, or when Jesus fed a multitude. It is just inexplicable how so many people can be fed with so little food. It is a miracle and miracles do not ask to be explained. Try to explain them and you will have missed the point. I have heard people kill a miracle by saying: 'I think I know what has happened; shall I explain it. Most of the people listening to Jesus had of course brought some food for themselves. Now what Jesus actually did was: Invite them all to share with those who had nothing. And after He started himself they did the same and when they had eaten there were quite a lot of left overs. Makes sense, doesn't it?

That might actually be what happened that day. But it is not what the book of Kings tells us, nor what John in his gospel wanted us to hear. Just listen to what is said, meditate on it and listen to what God is in fact telling us, instead of trying to be clever.

In both stories we hear of a multitude, a big number of people. In the first story it is the entourage of the man of God, Elisha, all the people following him as they want to be faithful to the God of Israël. And Jesus is surrounded by five-thousand men, representing all of Israël, God's chosen people. And all of those people were hungry. Perhaps not bodily hungry, but searching for help, for guidance, for care. They are the ordinary people, the people of our country, in our city, in our families or circles of friends. They are everyone wanting to find a listening ear, an understanding heart, some encouragement or consolation. All the people who hunger for a love that is fulfilling and a life that is worth living. Elisha calls them 'the people' and Jesus had pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

In both stories there is very little food to distribute. There is always greater need than there are resources to relieve it. That is the same, always and everywhere. There is always more virus than vaccines, more patients than beds. There is so much need, so much hunger. We might easily forget it in our wonderful country, graced with wonderful summer weather and all we could hope for in abundance. But a huge proportion of the world's population is living in the need of everything. They hunger!

The disproportion between the need, the number of the hungry and the tiny amount of food available is emphasized in both stories. The man who brings Elisha twenty barley loaves is asked to serve them to the people. Seeing the number of people and the few loaves in his hands he exclaims: "How can I serve this to hundred men?" And Andrew, the apostle, who found the little boy with five barley loaves and two fishes, asks: "What is that between so many?"

I can sympathize with them as you might. The problems we face are so overwhelming. Just look at the pictures of destruction in Limburg, Belgium or Germany after the torrential rain and you will feel the helplessness of anyone who wants to start restoring the life of the people. Reading the papers we are constantly confronted by the world's needs. It makes you

feel so small and inadequate. What have I got to offer? How can I make a difference? I feel greatly for Elisha's servant who was reluctant to serve his tiny offering to the hungry men. And again and again I feel for Andrew: What is it I have to offer in comparison to the need.? But Elisha trusts a different helper. He is 'the man of God' and he trusts the Lord: "The Lord says this: 'They will eat and have some left over!' And Jesus took the loaves, thanked his heavenly Father, and gave them out. Go ahead, Elisha insists: Take the little bit that you have, that you are, and serve it!. And Jesus makes do with the little we have to offer and tells us: "Go and share it, and dont forget to pick up the pieces left over afterwards."

It is very difficult to understand what was going on. The gospel does not tell us that Jesus multiplied the bread. And the gospel does not recount that the bread multiplied in the hands of the disciples. The only thing we hear is that Elisha's servant served the small amount of bread to the men. They ate and had some over. And Jesus gave the five loaves and two fishes to be handed out as much as was wanted. And they filled twelve hampers with scraps left over from the meal. God was -and is- at work when we do what we can with the little we have, not keeping it for ourselves, but sharing, giving, spending it. Then miracles happen. Miracles happened and are happening in Limburg. The waters came down, and the rivers overflowed into houses and public places reducing homes and businesses to rubble. Everyone witnessing what happened was overwhelmed. It was so bad, so intense destructive; what could anyone do? But people did. Now that the waters are going down you hear the stories. People just did. With the meagre means at their disposal they went out to help. They did not tire nor shy away. They did and gave what they could. They saved situations and rescued people. They helped each other and did not give up hope. That is the lesson taught us by these biblical stories. Every time you are confronted with problems, with requests for help and with always insufficient means to do the job, trust in our Lord. Trust the Lord and get going. If you dont start, if you give up or sit down is desperation, nothing will happen. God needs you and all the little bits you have to offer. Start to do what you can to help your fellow men with what you have and what you are. And miracles will happen. Afterwards, looking back you will be amazed of what has been achieved. So much more than might be expected. God is at work and we cannot explain what and how He does it. But there are always left overs although we only had so little to offer. Amen.