

About 4 Ounces
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Generally I am a glass-half-full kind of person. I anticipate that what comes next will be better than what came before. I am optimistic about setting and achieving goals, and I expect good things. Some people, of course, are glass-half-empty types. They focus on what is missing, what has been taken already, and future limitations.

But what about the water already in the glass? I look at the old comparison of glass-half-full versus glass-half-empty in the same way that I look at optimism and pessimism. I consider them to explain the relationship between what came before and what comes after. Comparing yesterday and tomorrow. Strangely, though, what I am left with after a few minutes contemplation is about four ounces of H₂O. Calling the glass half full or half empty does not provide me with guidance on how to deal with the water I am holding. Should I drink it? Save it? Splash it in someone's face? Baptize with it? Water a plant?

That question translates into other arenas of my life as well. While I am hopeful when looking forward and thankful in looking back, I spend considerably less time considering the "here and now." I tend to be one step ahead of myself.

In today's gospel reading we heard about the feeding of the multitudes. The story begins as a classic glass-half-empty scenario. We have a poorly-planned speaking engagement for an up-and-coming religious icon in the worst possible location. Someone had the not-so brilliant idea to make the event free and open to the public, and the response was far beyond what was anticipated.

There is no proper infrastructure and the planning committee is flummoxed. Who was in charge of the catering?

This is where we see Jesus' remarkable approach to problem solving. His response would not fly in the corporate world, and certainly not in government. Instead of strategizing about how to obtain adequate food or collecting money from everyone in attendance and sending out a shopping party, Jesus assesses what is at hand. He neither says the glass is half empty — as in, “Oh no, we can't feed everyone with this!” — nor that the glass is half full — “Oh good, at least four people can get a meal!” Instead, he provides the disciples with a new understanding of the word “enough.” He puts into practice what he taught in the Sermon on the Mount — “Do not worry, saying ‘what shall we eat?’ or ‘what shall we drink?’ your heavenly Father knows that you need these things. But seek first God's kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”¹

Jesus takes a hold of the food provided by a child and gives thanks for it. And in his hands, God made that food enough. It satisfied the hungry crowd and convinced them of Jesus' power to the extent that they sought to make him their king. Isn't it interesting that they moved so quickly from satisfaction to desiring more? While Jesus had focused his attention on the here and now, using what was available to do God's will, the people almost immediately began clamoring for what would happen tomorrow. And as we'll see next week, they continued to demand more and more miracles.

¹ Matthew 6:31-33 paraphrased

I've noticed that my own tendency is to look towards tomorrow when I wonder where God is calling me. It may have been ingrained in me through my years of ministry education that "call" is a future goal to work towards. I selected classes, invested my time, and wrote papers in order to prepare myself for a future position. All of that forward thinking has prompted me to always hear the word "call" as something I work towards. But in the way Jesus dealt with problems, I am beginning to see a different way of looking at things — "call" isn't just what I do tomorrow, it is who I am today. It is not simply something I prepare for in the future. It is also something that I am already prepared for here and now. It isn't whether the glass is half full or half empty — it is what I do with those four ounces of water.

I have a sense that the same tendency exists in churches as well. Do we put so much energy into where God is calling us tomorrow that we neglect what we could be doing today? In some ways we do a good job of avoiding that inclination. In relation to our building, at least, the congregation has developed the sense that we need to do the best we can with what we have — to flourish where we are planted. And in our relationship to Allegheny Mennonite Conference, we've worked hard to live within the constraints placed upon us and act as a witness to the gifts of inclusiveness.

However, I wonder if there are other areas in which we work more from a framework of what we wish we had rather than what we actually have. I've certainly felt that tendency myself this summer. I notice myself assuming that things need to wait till fall to get done — when attendance bounces back and

when Cindy returns. But the fact of the matter is that God has a calling for us here and now — today — that we can accomplish. It may not be the same as it will be in the fall, but we are still a community that ministers together.

What would an honest assessment of our resources look like? Would we focus on our decreased vacation season attendance? The fact that our pastoral staff is at half power and that the remaining half is sleep-deprived? That with lower attendance comes lower offering numbers? That our relationship to our conference is in flux?

Yes, those things are all a part of our reality right now. However, God has a calling for us, even within all of that. What if we looked at the good gifts we've been given this summer? One that comes to mind for me is the surprise revelation that Nate Hajdu was willing to preach. Another was the beautiful testimony we heard last week from our representatives to the Columbus convention. Or the fact that we seem to be in the midst of a mini baby-boom. Or that even with Cindy on sabbatical and me in the hospital for Ezra's birth, this is the type of church that keeps doing God's work. Our ministry, thank God, does not depend on professionals, but rather on the work of a committed body of believers.

In addition to the gifts we saw revealed in Nate a few weeks ago, I wonder what latent talents there are lurking in those pews. What would gifts discernment look like if instead of waiting for someone to nominate us for a position, or instead of thinking exclusively in terms of what committee meetings we could attend, we did an honest assessment of ourselves, asking, what do I have to give

to the church? What can I offer here and now? What has God prepared me to do?

Because the fact is, with God's help, whatever we have right now is enough for us to be who God calls us to be. God has prepared us for today, even as we are being prepared for tomorrow. God does not ask us to be more than we are, but might make us more than we ever could have asked or imagined.