

“Parts of the Whole”
Binkley Baptist Church
Luke 9:12-17
May 18, 2008
Collaborative Sermon

Delivered by Beth Honeycutt, Denise Cumbee Long, Dale Osborne, Leandra Merea Stroe
Written by Beth Honeycutt

The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to Jesus and said, “Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place.” But Jesus said to them, “You give them something to eat.” They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” For there were about five thousand gathered. And Jesus said to his disciples, “Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” They did so and made them all sit down. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, Jesus looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces. (Luke 9:12-17 NRSV).

About one month ago, on the women’s retreat, we celebrated communion during Sunday worship. Linda Textoris had prepared a beautiful loaf of challah bread. It had been carefully mixed, kneaded and braided together. It rose into a large loaf prior to baking. It shone with the egg that had been brushed on its top, which was dotted with poppy seeds. Its fragrance was comforting and inviting. The bread was gorgeous—God’s gifts from the earth worked by human hands made for magnificent, *whole* loaf of bread.

There is something wondrous about *the whole*—something mysterious that is more than the sum of its parts. Our participation in a church means that we worship, we serve, we build relationships—but taken together, these things are more than isolated actions. They multiply to make a community of belonging.

Like Jesus feeding the crowd, our communion leader Jan Clark took the loaf and broke it into large pieces. The one loaf became several smaller loaves. We took turns serving the bread to each other. Crumbs fell on the floor and our hands and clothing as the bread was distributed. The loaf was transformed from being one to being many, from being whole to being parts. It spread from one place and one pair of hands into many hands throughout the room.

As in the Bible story, the bread that was scattered about—in seeming chaos—was nonetheless abundantly nourishing. There was more than enough leftover somehow. In the story, the concluding miracle is that twelve full baskets of bread were collected, brought together, becoming a new whole all over again. The bread was ready to be shared and given again.

Whether in a large crowd or a small group, sharing bread is a clear image of God’s presence with us. The one, whole loaf is like the incarnation of God in Christ—into a particular person at a particular time. Jesus was a new revelation of God, a new way of God being with us. We celebrate that at Christmas, while this time of year, we celebrate Jesus’ willingness to be transformed. The Holy Spirit was also a new revelation of God, a new way of God being with us. In communion, the bread *could* stay on the table, on the plate, beautiful and perfect in its wholeness. But bread—and indeed *God*—can do and be more than that. The bread is transformed into a new way of being bread, so that it can come close to us. The bread is offered by a friend, taken in our hands, chewed in our mouth and digested in our bodies. It is transformed from one into many. It is quite daring for God and for us to embrace each other as the Spirit scatters, spreads out, and comes near to us.

Last fall, the choirs and education programs began work in their particular areas—a bit like Jesus and the disciples organizing the crowd into smaller groups. Now we are gathering up all that has happened, all that is leftover. As we collected it, we notice that people of all ages have learned and grown. An adult student has shared his questions and wisdom with others. A child in the choir has learned new singing skills. A teenager

has had a safe place to examine issues of our day. A young child has learned to trust her teachers and now doesn't cry when her parents bring her to class. A chancel choir member sings joyfully and takes part in a caring community each Wednesday night. An older child has bravely volunteered to read out loud in Sunday School classes despite reading challenges. A youth choir member has special confidence that comes from singing well with her peers.

Today we gather up the overflowing abundance of these groups. We send forth our deacons today, trusting the Spirit's presence in our common life. With God's help, all these *parts* have all made significant contributions to the *whole* of Binkley church. Thanks be to God!

Here's how the sermon was scripted and delivered:

BETH: The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to Jesus and said,

LEANDRA: "Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place."

DENISE: But Jesus said to them, "You give them something to eat."

DALE: They said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people." For there were about five thousand gathered.

LEANDRA: And Jesus said to his disciples, "Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each." They did so and made them all sit down.

DALE: And taking the five loaves and the two fish, Jesus looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd.

DENISE: And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces. (Luke 9:12-17 NRSV).

BETH: About one month ago, on the women's retreat, we celebrated communion during Sunday worship. Linda Textoris had prepared a beautiful loaf of challah bread.

DENISE: It had been carefully mixed, kneaded and braided together. It rose into a large loaf prior to baking. It shone with the egg that had been brushed on its top, which was dotted with poppy seeds. Its fragrance was comforting and inviting.

BETH: The bread was gorgeous—God's gifts from the earth, worked by human hands, made for a magnificent, *whole* loaf of bread.

LEANDRA: There is something wondrous about *the whole*—something mysterious that is more than the mere sum of its parts.

DALE: Our participation in a church means that we worship, we serve, we build relationships—but taken together, these things are more than isolated actions. They multiply to make a community of belonging.

DENISE: Like Jesus feeding the crowd, our communion leader Jan Clark took the loaf and broke it into large pieces. The one loaf became several smaller loaves.

BETH: We took turns serving the bread to each other. Crumbs fell on the floor and our hands and clothing as the bread was distributed.

DENISE: The loaf was transformed from being one to being many, from being whole to being parts. It spread from one place and one pair of hands into many hands throughout the room.

BETH: As in the Bible story, the bread that was scattered about—in seeming chaos—was nonetheless abundantly nourishing. There was more than enough leftover somehow.

DALE: In the story, the concluding miracle is that twelve full baskets of bread were collected, brought together, becoming a new whole all over again. The bread was ready to be shared and given again.

LEANDRA: Whether in a large crowd or a small group, sharing bread is a clear image of the Divine presence with us.

DALE: The one, whole loaf is like the incarnation of God in Christ—into a particular person at a particular time.

DENISE: Jesus was a new revelation of God, a new way of God being with us. We celebrate that at Christmas, while this time of year, we celebrate Jesus' willingness to be transformed.

BETH: The Holy Spirit was also a new revelation of God, a new way of God being with us.

DENISE: In communion, the bread *could* stay on the table, on the plate, beautiful and perfect in its wholeness. But bread—and indeed *God*—can do and be more than that.

LEANDRA: The bread is transformed into a new way of being bread, so that it can come close to us. The bread is offered by a friend, taken in our hands, chewed in our mouths and digested in our bodies.

BETH: The bread is transformed from one into many.

DALE: It is quite daring for God and for us to embrace each other as the Spirit scatters, spreads out, and comes near to us.

LEANDRA: Last fall, the choirs and education programs began work in their particular areas—a bit like Jesus and the disciples organizing the crowd into smaller groups.

DENISE: Now we are gathering up all that has happened, all that is leftover. As we collect it, we notice that people of all ages have learned and grown.

BETH: An adult student has shared his questions and wisdom with others.

LEANDRA: A congregation member has been transported deeper into worship while hearing the children sing.

DALE: A teenager has had a safe place to examine issues of our day.

BETH: A young child has learned to trust her teachers and now doesn't cry when her parents bring her to class.

LEANDRA: A chancel choir member sings joyfully and takes part in a caring community each Wednesday night.

DALE: An older child has bravely volunteered to read out loud in Sunday School classes despite reading challenges.

DENISE: A worshipper in the congregation rejoices to see a youth choir member have special confidence that comes from singing well with her peers.

LEANDRA: Today we gather up the overflowing abundance of these groups, trusting the Spirit's presence in our common life.

DENISE: We are ending and beginning—honoring teachers and sending forth deacons.

DALE: With God's help, every *part* contributes to the *whole* of Binkley church.

ALL: Thanks be to God! Amen.