Ok, another classic text today about Jesus. And what makes this what it is, is that it’s a test of the disciples understanding of what Jesus is about. It’s not really compassion today for the poor, other Gospels have that emphasis when they tell this story. It certainly isn’t that Jesus can do amazing miracles. Imagine that you are in class and Jesus is handing out a test. To see if you are getting it. This is a test to see if we are getting at a very specific issue I think, about where we find God’s presence in the world.

The issue is what we do with scarcity. And the test is this. How do you respond when you find yourself in a world or in a situation where you don’t seem to have enough? When it seems like you need more than you have. It’s sort of that feeling that reality that happens at the food stand, when someone orders 5 hamburgers and you run up to get the burgers but there’s only two. It’s like it’s time to pay the bill and you suddenly discover that you left your credit card at home. This is a very important and common experience I think of being a human being. The experience of scarcity.

Let’s start with the issue in as big a way as we can. Just the creation as a whole. Living on this planet how central is this experience of not having enough. Think of what we hear about water for example in the future. We are constantly being reminded that one day we might not have enough water. For many people daily life is a constant stress about not having enough money. There isn’t enough land in some places, not enough housing. Just not enough resources like coal or gas or food. The population is exploding on the earth and it’s stressful, how are we going to have enough for everyone. There isn’t enough time, you constantly hear that. There’s not enough jobs, now there isn’t enough labor. There isn’t enough room for all of our garbage. Shortages of every kind are constantly plaguing us so to speak. Not enough rain. Surely we find ourselves at times in the grip of scarcity and that kind of anxiety.

We can experience scarcity in just about anything. I don’t have enough friends. I don’t have enough influence or pull to make things things happen. I don’t have enough smarts, or intelligence. I don’t have enough support. In the church it’s not enough people, not enough interest. My car doesn’t have enough power, my house doesn’t have enough room. I don’t have enough ideas. I don’t have enough strength or speed. I don’t have enough tools or clothes. I can be up here thinking that I’m just not enough. Just don’t have enough cool. I don’t have enough strength. There isn’t enough love. Not enough people who care. No matter what we do, we can be caught in this grip of scarcity.

In our text today, this is the test. What do I do, when that test comes to me? And I think that even though it’s not a part of our regular conversation always, we’re in that grip of scarcity maybe more than we realize. There is not enough hours in the day sometimes. It especially hits us when we look to the future. Our military is the biggest in the world, but it just never seems to be enough. How do we deal with this? That’s the test. What do we do with scarcity?

Well it’s clear how the disciples respond. They see scarcity as a problem. And surely it is. It’s a problem if there isn’t enough for what you need, doesn’t matter what it is. Scarcity is surely a problem. Even more than that I think you can say that they believe that scarcity is simply a negative. It’s bad. But even more than that is that scarcity is often a source of shame. This was huge in the ancient culture and I think its similar for us today. The first miracle in the Gospel of John happens at a wedding where the host ran out of wine. I mean that was a disaster in the culture and the primary disaster was that it shamed the host. If you don’t have enough, you are a failure. And we don’t want to run into that. That’s the real problem with scarcity isn’t it? What’s wrong with me? Scarcity gets associated with shame. Or perhaps blame.

In America it’s even more difficult because our values are all about prosperity and success. There are no limitations on what we can do, if we put our minds to it. I’ll keep repeating that, that’s the essence of what we call secularism. The secular world view is that we can overcome any scarcity. There aren’t any no’s. There aren’t any limitations. Limitations for us are there to be overcome. So if you’re dogged by scarcity it’s because you’re not working hard enough. Or you’re messing up your life somehow. All of our inspiration is about unlimited. Unlimited potential, unlimited progress, unlimited resources. Overcoming every limitation. All our sins are overcome. I think the favorite Bible verse of our culture is “with God all things are possible”. And what that often means is that with God there are no limitations to what we are capable of.” There isn’t any scarcity, or shouldn’t be. Even God is found primarily in abundance and prosperity for us. Or that’s the god we want. And so if there isn’t enough, it’s because we’re blowing it somehow. It’s a source of shame.

So we have dazzled with world with our ways of creating wealth and prosperity. But is it working? Do we feel that clinging scarcity less today? I’m not rejecting secularism outright. I’m glad that many of our limitations have been overcome, I probably wouldn’t be here today without people who refused to be bound by their limitations. But we live in a world where there is more available to do an be than in any time in history. And yet the scarcity remains doesn’t it. In fact, I would say that we seem more captured than ever by this feeling of scarcity. We’re going to run out. Isn’t that interesting. The more we try to avoid it, the more we become aware of it.

Perhaps then we need another way to think about scarcity. Well, welcome to our text today. Because Jesus does something quite different with scarcity today doesn’t he? He gives the disciples the test, and as they often do, they fail it, because they just assume that scarcity is bad. But it’s not bad for Jesus, it’s not even a problem. It certainly isn’t something to be ashamed of. The text is written to magnify the situation. 5,000 people five loaves and two fish. It’s nothing but scarcity. Nothing but a limitation. But somehow Jesus takes that scarcity, and makes it more than enough. What if that was all we knew about God? That when we feel like we don’t have enough, that’s where we the most open to understanding and connecting to God? Maybe scarcity offers something that abundance never could.

See what would our lives be without the experience of scarcity? The Olympics began yesterday I think. And the whole focus of the Olympics of course will be getting a gold medal. But gold medals are pretty scarce aren’t they? In fact, it’s the scarcity that creates the value of a gold medal right? If everyone got a gold medal, gold medals wouldn’t mean much. And scarcity quite often, creates value doesn’t it? Watch American pickers. The whole show is about finding that prize in the old dusty barn, that only scarcity creates.

That’s what our text is about today. The prize that scarcity creates. My guess is that as parent you know the value of not giving your kid everything they want. You already know the value of creating scarcity. Up to a point it helps your child grow up. What if it always rained exactly when you wanted it to. And what if there was never any dry seasons. Is there something about scarcity, of finding yourself not having enough that is a gift. What if you apply for a job and someone else gets it. You didn’t have quite enough. Is there a gift in that? Is there nourishment in that? Something that will help you become a better and stronger person? In the church for years fasting was just a part of what it meant to be a Christian. Learning the gifts that can only be discovered when your hungry. It’s already established I think that if you try to deal with scarcity by getting more, that doesn’t work.

The people misunderstand completely. They want to make Jesus king because they believe now they won’t have anymore scarcity. No more drought, no more not having enough. Think about a military that doesn’t have to take so much food with it when they go to war. A few fish is all they’ll need. Send your 10 dollars to the 700 club and you’ll get a hundred back. Yeah, they think this means that they’ll all be rich. Scarcity is over. So they want to make him king.

When this happens, Jesus literally heads for the hills. The Greek word for withdrew means literally to run away. Because this of course was exactly the opposite of his message. This wasn’t an instant prosperity Gospel. Again, it’s just the opposite. See, that was the test wasn’t it. When you find that you don’t have enough, what’s the teaching? I don’t have to have enough to be enough. I don’t have to get a gold medal to be enough. I don’t have to have enough money to be enough. I don’t have to good enough, or popular enough, or rich enough, or smart enough. I don’t have to be tough enough. I’m human. I’m a human who is limited in many ways. I live in limited world. And yes, I am comstantly being made aware of scarcity. But in Jesus Christ that scarcity becomes a gift, that opens up the meaning of love. I may not have enough, but that’s just fine. My limitations bear the gift. I am enough. And so are you. Amen.