"Rejoicing in Love: Being More Than Enough Together" Rev. Dr. Craig Lemming
Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time The House of Hope Presbyterian Church
Mark 8:1-8 Saint Paul, Minnesota
September 27, 2026

Come, Holy Spirit, and fill each of us with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control[1] . Amen.

I am deeply grateful for the honor of preaching in this glorious sanctuary on this marvelous occasion as we celebrate the Reverend Phillip Romine's Installation as your Associate Pastor for Spiritual and Community Care. Thank you, Phillip and Scott, and everyone involved, for this beautiful gift and tremendous privilege. I bring warm greetings to you all from your neighbors a few blocks away at Saint the Evangelist Episcopal Church where I serve as the Associate Rector.

When Phil asked me to preach at today's installation, I was gripped with an old fear. A fear I experienced thirteen years ago when I first met Phil Romine. In September of 2013, I was a brand-new seminarian at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, located then in New Brighton. I was working three jobs while earning my Master of Divinity degree. With my academic advisor's help, we worked out the most efficient and cost-effective way to complete all the MDiv academic requirements in four years. In that first year of seminary, I had to take one elective. And the only elective with no prerequisites that aligned with my work schedule was *The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann* taught by the magnificent Reverend Dr. Paul Capetz. For those who have never heard of Rudolf Bultmann, he was a prominent German Lutheran theologian and one of the most influential 20th century New Testament scholars. Bultmann was also blessed with an impressive pair of jowls that made him look like a grumpy old bloodhound![2] Bultmann wrote dense theological texts that I had absolutely no business studying as a first-year seminarian! Phillip Romine was the other MDiv student in that three-person seminar. As those hefty assigned readings took their toll on my mind, I realized I was out of my depth. Even with Dr. Capetz's careful guidance and devotion to leading us through Bultmann's tomes, I was gripped with that old fear. **The fear of not being good enough**. When Phil asked me to preach in this hallowed pulpit on such a momentous occasion, I was gripped again with that old **fear of not being good enough**.

What if our deepest spiritual struggle is not that we have too little, but that we have been duped into believing that we are not enough? The fears of not having enough, not doing enough, or not being enough distort our relationship with our true self, with our neighbors, and with God. Halfway through that Bultmann class, I was on the brink of being duped into those sinful distortions. Then Phillip Romine and his wonderful spouse Liz Stoneburg, invited me into their home for a meal. Phil and Liz re-humanized me as we shared delicious food, laughed at stories from our own lives, delighted in our love of sacred choral music, and marveled at the foibles of those wayward Anglican vicars on the PBS television series *Grantchester*. Phil and Liz shared the love of God with me—their overwhelmed, overworked, foreign neighbor—by breaking bread and giving thanks, and sharing the joys and struggles of this earthly pilgrimage together. I rejoice today that the love and care of Phil and Liz over the last thirteen years of friendship continues to free me from that old, sinful fear of unworthiness. Unworthiness is sinful because it denies the Truth—that God's love in Christ makes every person more than worthy.

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[1] The Fruits of the Holy Spirit in Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians 5:22.

[2] https://kids.kiddle.co/Rudolf_Bultmann

Rejoicing in that love begins when we accept that our true worth is not something we can produce. Sharing God's love begins with a friend who truly sees *who we are* in all of our humanity; a friend who truly sees *whose we are* in all of our belovedness. We are enough because we are held in the unfathomable love of God—and from that place of belovedness, all that we are, all that we do, and all that we humbly offer to God and to one another becomes more than enough for God's love to resurrect us in abundant life.

The Gospel we heard this morning interrupts those old, sinful fears of not having enough, not doing enough, and not being enough. In her novel, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* Willa Cather wrote, "**Where there is great love there are always miracles**."[3] The miracle in today's Gospel begins with Jesus **seeing** a great crowd without anything to eat and saying to his disciples, "I have **compassion** for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat." Love begins when we **see** one another's humanity with **compassion**. Jesus sees and suffers with. Before miracles occur, God's compassion recognizes human suffering. The disciples see logistical problems. Jesus sees beloved people. That difference matters. The disciples ask the scarcity question: how could we possibly get enough, have enough, do enough to satisfy the hunger of a multitude? It is an understandable question. According to the arithmetic available to those who are overwhelmed, overworked, and fearful, resources are scarce.

And Jesus asks: "How many loaves do you have?"
Jesus does <u>not</u> ask: "Why didn't you bring more?"
Instead, Jesus asks: What do you have?
And the disciples humbly offer Jesus all that they have: seven loaves.
That's where the miracle begins.

God does not require what we do not have. God's miracle of love works with what we do have. Jesus begins with what is actually there. Seven loaves. A tired crowd. A hungry community. And seemingly finite resources. And Jesus gives thanks for all of these gifts. Jesus gives thanks for what is; then God's abundance becomes real. They also had a few small fish; and after **blessing** them, Jesus ordered that these too should be distributed. They ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full.

Jesus **blesses** what is humbly offered. A few small fish. God blesses whatever we are grateful to humbly offer and with that blessing God fills the hungry with good things. Being grateful and calling what we have, who we are, and what we do, Very Good, is more than enough for God's miracle of love to satisfy and delight a multitude of weary, hungry, foreign, fellow pilgrims.

To resist being duped into the sinful lies and deceptions of not having enough, doing enough, or being enough, requires spiritual discipline. In 1963, the great Black mystic, philosopher, theologian, and spiritual director of the Civil Rights Movement, Howard Thurman published a small but powerful text titled, *Disciplines of the Spirit*.[4] House of Hope, as you and your Associate Pastor for Spiritual and Community Care embark on this new covenantal pilgrimage together, I offer a summary of Howard Thurman's five Disciplines of the Spirit as a framework for sharing in the ministries of Spiritual and Community Care.

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[3] Willa Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927).

[4] Howard Thurman, *Disciplines of the Spirit* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

First: **Commitment.** Everyday, surrender your will to God's love. Thurman characterizes Commitment as a dynamic, unfinished process wherein a focused "singleness of mind" anchors our choices to the absolute value of love.

Second: **Growing in Wisdom and Stature.** With Jesus as his model, Thurman frames spiritual growth as a demanding, transformative process that requires us to accept our personal realities, embrace change, and cultivate patience in moving toward our divine potential. Side note: thanks to growing in Wisdom with Dr. Capetz and Phil Romine, I passed that Bultmann class. And Bultmann brings us to Thurman's third Spiritual Discipline.

Suffering: As followers of Jesus, crucified and risen, when we recognize our shared suffering, we know that we are not alone, and that our pain serves as a catalyst for profound spiritual transformation when met with the creative power of the human spirit.

Fourth: **Prayer.** Prayer serves as an inward centering practice. It readies the mind, emotions, and spirit to perceive the presence of God, functioning as a quiet anchor against anxiety and despair.

Lastly: **Reconciliation.** Reconciliation heals the divides within and between us. It requires dropping our defenses, overcoming fear and deceit, and embracing an ethical commitment to a shared, interconnected humanity.

House of Hope and the Reverend Phillip Romine, as you live into your **commitment**; **grow in wisdom and stature**; care for one another's **sufferings**; **pray** together; and practice **reconciliation**, may Howard Thurman's Disciplines of the Spirit bring forth God's abundant love in all the lives entrusted to your collective care. The sin of unworthiness is rampant and famishing countless lives in our world. Nevertheless, that old sin of unworthiness has been, is, and shall always be defeated by sharing God's love. May we choose to see one another's belovedness. May we humbly offer all that we have in serving God by loving all of our neighbors. May we give thanks for, bless, and share those humble gifts. And may we rejoice in being more than enough together in God's love. Amen.