

I have been working on a theology but it's not quite complete. The theology is that we offer what little we have to God and God multiplies it. The lesson today from the prophet Elisha and from John's Gospel underlines this idea. A man brought twenty loaves of bread to the prophet. It was not enough to feed the 100 people who had gathered. Elisha pronounced, "God will provide more than enough!" They broke the bread and shared it and they had more than enough. In the Gospel lesson, there were more than 5000 people gathered. All they had was five loaves and two fish. Jesus gave thanks, blessed it, broke it and they share it. And, as you know, there was twelve baskets full of bread left over. This is what I call, God the Multiplier. We offer something small, like five loaves of bread, and God multiplies it. Our offer can be a simple prayer. God takes it and multiplies it.

Let's take a look at it this way: you know the Christmas song, The Little Drummer Boy. What can he offer to the king? All he has is his drum. But that's enough, or, more than enough because everyone loves his playing – especially the king.

When it comes to prayer, it is like the loaves and fish with God as Multiplier. We offer our meager prayers – our hopes – and God multiplies them. It's an amazing concept, the more I think about it, that we make our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God and God gives us much more in return. Likewise, when we offer up our anxieties and our concerns to God we receive God's peace. God's peace is much bigger than our worries.

Have you seen God the Multiplier in your life? Have you had a time when you offered up something to God and God made it much bigger?

Speaking of multiplication, what is 10 times 1. Yep, 10. What about 10×10 ? 100. How about 10×0 ? Yeah, it's zero. For the person who crosses their arms, refuses to pray, and says, "I'll just wait here to see if God shows up." That's a $10 \times 0 = 0$. The Multiplier is waiting but there is nothing to multiply so the answer remains zero. Even if we offer up a 1, God, who multiplies, brings the 10 so that $10 \times 1 = 10!$

When I come up with a theology like this, I run it through the Steve Test. This is the first time that I've talked about running a theology through the Steve Test so let me take a moment to explain what it is. I had a parishioner, who I call "Steve", who was a contrarian. Everything I'd bring up with him, he'd look at the opposite of it. Although this is an important person to have when discerning, it's also a little difficult at times. In one governing board meeting, Steve said for the fourth time, "Playing Devil's Advocate here..." I put my hand on the table and said, "Steve, the devil has plenty of advocates; let's focus on what God's will is in this church." Nevertheless, Steve and I had a good relationship and would have lunch from time to time to discuss things like the opposite side of my sermons and reflections. He gave me a gift called the Steve Test. I take a theology and run it by him (in theory, of course, not in person). What would the Steve Test say about God the multiplier? He'd say, "What about unanswered prayer. Did God multiply it or just not answer it?"

To answer the Steve Test, I'd say that God does answer every prayer. No is a perfectly legitimate answer to prayer. So is "not yet". At least, in my experience with prayer to God, I get "no" or "not yet". It happens. Nevertheless, it's still an answer. In fact, I believe that God says "no" a lot louder than when God says "yes". God's "yes" floats in the wind and is more discernable from a distance. In other words, it's there but one has to listen closely and follow gently behind it.

Taking this one step further, I know a parishioner who, when he was 10 years old, prayed for a new bike on Christmas Eve. On Christmas morning, he and his brother ran into the living room. Santa had arrived! There were stockings stuffed with gifts. There were presents under the tree; but no bike. A week later, the 10-year-old asked his priest about it during coffee hour. He said, "I prayed for a new bike on Christmas and I didn't get one. What does that say about God?" The priest replied, "Let me get this straight: you have a bike but wanted a new one" (The child nodded yes) "And you are wondering what that says about God? (pause) It tells me God is not a bike builder." The priest went on, "Is there somewhere in town where you can get a bike?" The child responded yes – at a sporting goods store. The priest asked if there are any garage sales in his neighborhood where someone is selling a bike. The child nodded yes. The priest said, "So, there are places where you can get your prayer answered because God left bikes – building them and distributing them – to us. But when you do pray, ask for something that only God can give. Pray for peace in our hearts. Pray for joy in our families and our community. Pray for faith and for justice. Leave the bikes up to humans."

Speaking of prayer and children, I was told a story at our discussion group this past week (where we were talking about prayer). The parishioner told me a children's sermon she heard years ago. The priest said this: Let's say we want to bake a cake. We don't just make it up, we follow a recipe. There are many ingredients, when mixed together, make a cake – there is sugar, flour, water and even salt. If you add too much salt, the cake will taste bad. If you don't add any salt, the cake will taste bad. But, if you add the right amount, the whole cake will be tasty. A cake recipe calls for a teaspoon of salt. The recipe won't spell out teaspoon, it will say TSP. It's an acronym for teaspoon. And TSP is an acronym for prayer too. The "T" is for "thanksgiving". The first recipe in prayer is to give thanks to God at all times and in all places. The second letter, "S" is for sorry. When we pray, we sometimes say we are sorry to God for the times when we did not love God with all our heart and love our neighbor as ourselves. The third letter, "P" is for please. Once we thank God, and say we are sorry, we then ask God to please help – our families, our friends and those in our world. That's the recipe for prayer – TSP – thanks, sorry, please.

God takes our TSP and multiplies it. Like a cake, that is more than the sum of its parts, the cake grows (multiplies) and needs to be shared. We must break the cake, if you will, to share it. Jesus lifted up the bread, gave thanks, and said, "This is my body, broken for you. Break it and share it until I return."

Jesus also said, "My peace I give to you and my peace I leave with you. I don't give as the world gives, I give you peace as my Father has given me." When we pray, when we follow the TSP, our please should be around things that God provides – peace, love, joy, faith and hope. When we make our offering in prayer to God, it will be multiplied.

When have you experienced God multiplying in your life? For me, I remember a time when Christi and I thought we couldn't have kids. We now have five grandchildren, two sons-in-law and one daughter-in-law (and our kids, of course). God gives, and sees, not as the world gives, or sees, but as only the Multiplier could.

Speaking of prayer, and answers, our religious tradition says that God speaks through Scripture, through nature, and through other people. If you are looking for God to answer, and answer quickly, read Scripture. And, not just read it, but read it with your TSP – thanking, sorry, and for your please. What you read will help answer your please. I can give you specifics, but, if you are looking for something in general (or right now), read the Psalms and listen for God's voice. Which psalm? Honestly, in my experience, it doesn't matter – just read them. Thankfully, the psalms are in the middle section of every Bible. Just grab a book, open it to the middle, bring your TSP and start reading.

If you are not in the mood to say your "s" for sorry to God, try a different "s" – "show me".

God speaks through nature. My mentor often begins his T prayer with "Thank you for the beauty of this day." He prays that because once, in his twenties, things were not going very well. He prayed this, "Thank you God for this day; show me your beauty, please." God multiplied beauty in nature before his eyes. It was a life changing experience and now that he is in his 60s, he is still thanking God for showing God's beauty in nature.

God speaks through other people. Have a trusted friend or family member or a pastor. Talk with them about what your "please" or your "show me" is. In that conversation, God's words and will becomes present. Reading Scripture in a group helps too. But, prayer in Scripture, prayer in nature, those can be fulfilling solitary and peaceful encounters, all the while remember that God also speaks through other people which includes speaking through you too.

Another example is with you all. Six years ago, I had completed being a part of a team that transitioned St. John's to the church and outreach center that it is today. It took a lot out of me to do it. There were many surprises and disappointments along the way. I had not taken good care of myself and especially with my own spiritual health. So much so that I was starting to wonder if God had called me to be priest. Or, at least, if I still had it in me to be a priest. With that doubt, we set off searching for God's call. That call led me to you and All Angels. Six years later, I do believe God has called me, is calling (and will call) me to be a priest. I have come to understand that this is how (and why) God created me, my body and mind; so that I can serve Christ in this unique, set apart and special way. I felt that way before I agreed to be your Rector but, during the whole process, to my family and I saying yes to coming here, God has multiplied his gifts within me. I have been experiencing this within myself and in this community. For that, and many many more reasons, I give thanks everyday for being here and being Rector of All Angels.

I have experienced the $10 \times 0 = 0$; and $10 \times 1 = 10$; and $10 \times 10 = 100$. If I never lifted a finger, or a prayer, for God to show me where he has called me, that would have been a big "0". But with one prayer, and then with ten prayers, I have experienced God multiplying and multiplying.

So when I read about the man who brought ten loaves to the prophet Elisha and he wasn't worried because he believes in the God who multiplies, there was more than enough for everyone; when I read that, I am reminded of all the times God has multiplied around and in me. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.