

Today's text from II Kings begins not with scarcity but with generosity. It begins with the announcement that a man from Baal- Shalishah has come to bring "food from the first fruits." Note that the text doesn't give the name the man – only the name of the village he comes from. There is no indication of any obligation on the part of this man to provide food for Elisha. There isn't even any mention that Elisha is in need of food. The man shows up with "twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain." That's a lot of food. And think of the amount of work that went into producing those twenty loaves and harvesting the fresh ears of grain. I hope you get the point: This man – this stranger - is being very, very generous.

The unnamed man's surprising spirit of generosity is followed by another surprising spirit of generosity – Elisha tells his servant to give the food to the people to eat. Elisha decides to share. The text says there are hundred men. Who knows how many women and children were there too?

That's when the story takes a turn. This generous pile of food suddenly looks pretty small to the servant when faced with sharing it with 100 or more people. How was this going to work? "How can I set this before a hundred men?" What's left unsaid is that this amount of food isn't enough to go around. How is feeding everyone going to be accomplished with equity?

Elisha tells the servant to distribute the food anyway, because that's God's command. Beside, God promises that there will be leftovers. And it was so.

The parallels between this story and the story of the Feeding of the Five Thousand in John's gospel, are quite striking.

This time the person at the center is Jesus not Elisha. Jesus had had a busy day teaching and healing. He retreated with the disciples from the lake to a mountainside. But there was a hitch. The crowd followed.

Jesus asks – "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" Philip replies, "It will take eight months' worth of wages to buy that amount of food and we don't have that kind of money."

The drama continues. Andrew points out that there's a boy with 5 loaves and two fish. Clearly that's not enough to go around.

Underneath it all we can tell that the disciples approach the situation with a mindset of scarcity – a cannot do it attitude. Jesus approaches with an attitude of generosity, just like Elisha - a can do attitude. Jesus took the bread and fish, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to the people. Jesus shared, just like Elisha shared. Everyone had more than enough. And there were leftovers.

By now you might be trying to figure out why I titled this sermon B-E-A-M. Here's the answer.

The letter A stands for aspiration. God has outlined for us what we are to aspire to in all situations as well in daily living. Our aspirations are to be the same as God's. We know them from Scripture and from Jesus. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind and your neighbor as yourself. Loving God and our neighbor in all times and places is what we are to aspire to. After all, that's what God does. What does the Lord require of you? You know the answer: to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God. We are to aspire to justice for all in all situations, saying and doing the kind thing always, spreading kindness around and humility that is surrendering to God our lives and our goals. First we have to make sure that's what we are aiming for – A – God's aspirations and aims.

To reach God's aspirations starts with our mindset – that's what M stands for – Mindset. Note well, that the mindset of the unnamed man, of Elisha, and of Jesus was one of generosity, whereas the mindset of Elisha's servant and the disciples of Jesus was a mindset of scarcity. In each situation, things would not have worked out in a way that all were fed if Jesus and Elisha started from a mindset of scarcity. Paul says to the Philippians, "Have the same mind that was in Jesus Christ." The Holy Spirit gives us that mindset – love, joy, peace, patience, faithfulness, kindness, goodness, generosity, forbearance or mercy, and self-control. This is hard, because it is easy to react to situations not with these fruits of the spirit but with a different mindset – a mindset filled with things like anger, hate, lust, greed, fear, anxiety, selfishness, impatience, arrogance, entitlement, etc.

One of the reasons that I said in last week's sermon that it is so important to take a pause and take a breath before doing or saying any thing because when you are in the middle of a mess or something that is challenging or filled with tension or hurtful, it is so easy to react in a way that is not consistent with having the same mind as was in Christ. It is easy to have a knee-jerk reaction that is not Christ like. Sometimes we have to take a breath before acting in order to make sure that we are acting out of a mindset that is like that of Christ's. Sometimes when we take a pause we realize that we have to make a little mindset adjustment before doing or saying any thing. It's called being mindful of our mindsets – the letter M.

Then we can act. That gets us to the next letter, which is B. B stands for behavior. For both Elisha and Jesus their mindsets of generosity led them to share. Their behavior was straight-forward – they shared what was available, equally and with all people.

What was the result? Everyone was fed. In each case, the whole situation changed and changed for the better, changed for the benefit of everyone involved. That leads us to the next and last letter – E. E stands for environment. A Christ-like

mindset followed by loving behaviors changed the environment for everyone for the better.

I think of all of you who are going to Paterson to work on Habitat homes. It starts with a mindset of justice – that it is only fair that all people have safe, clean, adequate and affordable housing. The mindset of generosity is also involved. People are generous with whatever time, talent and treasure that they have. That leads to behavior – to actually going to work on these homes. The mindsets and behavior leads to changed neighborhoods – a better environment for all.

Obviously the order is AMBE. But that's hard to remember. B-E-A-M is much easier to remember. It's like "Beam me up, Scotty, " which is attributed to Star Trek. And by the way, did you know that the command, "Beam me up, Scotty" was never said on any of the Star Trek episodes or in any of the Star Trek movies? The quote somehow made its way into popular culture as a way of describing the desire to be somewhere else. Well, when we pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," we are pray our desire not to be somewhere else, but to have the world and our lives be something else – something more like what God intends. So perhaps what we can pray to God is, "Beam us forward each day of our lives."