

Well, I'm old enough to remember, how many are you old enough to remember, in the mail, opening an envelope and pulling out a folded piece of paper and reading a chain letter? Anyone remember? It always started something like this. Copy this letter and send a dollar to 10 people and mail it within four days or you'll have seven years of bad luck or something like that, right?

Then came the internet. Forward this email to 15 people in 30 seconds or your computer will crash. And usually right beneath there was a link to some free trial that was secretly designed to charge your credit card every month forever. Chain letters, email spam, and the modern fine print all rely on the exact same trick, fear and scarcity. They whisper that bad luck is right around the corner, resources are running out, We don't have enough, and if you aren't hyper-cautious, you're going to lose what little you have left.

Over time, that constant noise creates a defense mechanism in us. When we've been burned, tricked, or exhausted, we retreat into what psychologists might call a scarcity mindset. And here is the uncomfortable truth for us today. Scarcity can easily become a comfort zone. Scarcity feels safe. If we expect nothing, we won't be disappointed. If we keep our hands clutched tight, guard our remaining energy, and stay in limbo, nothing or nobody can hurt us or let us down.

When the prophet Isaiah stands up in today's first reading and shouts, "Hear everyone who thirsts. Come to the waters. You who have no money come buy and eat without price". Our cautious, experienced brains immediately get suspicious. What's the catch, Isaiah? Is this another trick? But Isaiah asks the defining question of our lives. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your earnings for that which does not satisfy? Why do we spend so much precious energy hiding in that safe, quiet comfort zone of scarcity?

Now scripture never demands that we fake happiness or pretend that life isn't hard. In our reading from Romans today, Paul speaks with total honesty about his own heart, writing, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish." In the gospel, Jesus is carrying his own deep grief after learning that his cousin, John the Baptist, was executed. What does Jesus do? He gets into the boat to find a deserted place, a wilderness, to be alone. But then we are reminded that he meets us right in our deserted places.

So, let's take a look at what happens there. When he's there, the crowd follows Jesus. He doesn't retreat behind a locked door. In Psalm 145, it states, "The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love." Jesus looks at the crowd with that very compassion and spends the entire day healing them.

As the evening fell and the story, the disciples panicked. They looked at the sun sinking low, looked at the barren wilderness, and ran straight to their comfort zone of scarcity. They told Jesus, this is a deserted place and the hour is now late. Send the crowds away so they can buy food for themselves. In other words, Lord, we don't have the capacity for this. Let's keep it small, safe, and manageable. But then Jesus says, they need not go away. You give them something to eat.

The disciples searched their pockets and pulled out five small rolls and two dried fish. If you were here a few weeks ago, Pastor Leslie brought up that old joke about the kid standing in front

of a giant, messy pile of, well, let's just call it barnyard fertilizer. The kid digging away with a big smile because he's convinced that with a pile that big, there's got to be a pony in there somewhere. Sometimes in life and in church, we get so focused on the mess, all the stuff piled around us, that we can't see the pony. We can't see the promise right in front of our faces.

So, well, this is probably good for me to sip. I brought this. What do you see? Do you see a glass half full? Or do you see a glass half empty? Some people who know me might describe me as the glass half empty kind of guy. But I don't see it that way. I consider myself more a realist than an analytical thinker. I certainly don't wear rose-colored glasses, and I'm definitely not one to pretend that a situation is something it's not just to make people feel better.

So I would say I just see the glass. My analytical mind looks at the glass, measures what's inside of it, and takes an honest inventory of the facts on the table. But seeing the glass clearly without sugarcoating it isn't about judgment or despair. I think it's an invitation to discover what's in the glass. When we stop panicking about what's missing and actually look at what's right in front of us, the analytical question changes. It stops being, why isn't this full or enough? and it becomes, okay, this is what we actually have here in our hands. What can we do with it? What can we build with this? Where is the opportunity?

And when we bring faith into the room, seeing the glass clearly is the exact moment where our human calculation stops and God's grace takes over. This is precisely what Jesus did on that hillside with five loaves and two fish where the disciples saw a shortage, Jesus saw an opportunity for God's grace to move. And not only did everyone eat, they collected 12 baskets of leftovers.

This brings us directly to the heart of today's message and the central question that Pastor Leslie has put squarely before us as we walk through this season of transition together. Pastor Leslie has asked us to pause and reflect on how we view our shared life at KLC. How do we approach our life individually, our life in community at KLC? Do we approach it with an attitude of abundance or with an attitude of scarcity? What would be different in both our own lives and in our community life if we lived every day believing and remembering that our God, who calls us beloved, is a God of abundance over and over again.

My KLC Ohana, in our recent journeys together, I understand why scarcity has felt like a comfort zone. Look at the glass we are holding today. This congregation has walked through long, uncertain pastoral transitions. We've weathered seasons where leadership struggled, where trust was broken, where sudden grief hit, a global pandemic, and local fires scarred our island home. When a church goes through this much trauma, hiding in scarcity becomes a security blanket. We stare at the mess and we forget to look for the grace.

Scarcity can whisper, we're getting older, our best days are behind us, let's just stay right here where it's safe. But seeing our glass clearly doesn't mean giving into scarcity. Seeing our reality clearly means recognizing that right here in this room, we have decades of faithful prayers, deep roots, resilient faith, and a wealth of wisdom. Our scriptures push us out of that quiet hiding place. Psalm 145 promises, "The Lord upholds all who fall. You open wide your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing."

Homily – August 2, 2026

God does not call KLC depleted. God does not call us expired or stuck. God calls us beloved. Jesus does not require us to have packed pews or endless youth before he can work among us, my friends. He simply says, bring what you have to me. Bring your real glass, our graying hair, your wisdom, your honest history, and your faithful presence, and place them in his hands.

The poet Jan Richardson captures this exact movement from scarcity to abundance in her poem, blessing of enough. "I know how small this blessing seems, just a morsel that hardly matches the sharp hunger you carry inside you. But trust me when I say, though I can scarcely believe it myself, that between and behind and beneath those words, there is a space where a table has been laid, a feast has been prepared, all has been made ready for you and it will be enough and more."

My friends here, Kihei Lutheran Church, there is no fine print with God. There is no hidden catch. Jesus is calling us out of the safe, quiet comfort zone of scarcity. He's asking us to sit down together at his table to unclench our hands and to trust that through all the stuff of life, what we have today in God's hand is more than enough. Amen.