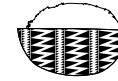


STORIES OF GOD'S ABUNDANCE

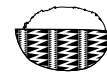
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 *AMBS*



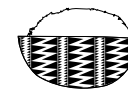
STORIES OF GOD'S ABUNDANCE

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INTRODUCTION

Stories are the building blocks of our lives. In other words, our lives are built out of one story and then another story. We are our family stories, our work and play stories, our faith stories, our church stories, and the list goes on and on. The Bible stories that we hear and learn build and shape our faith. I believe at the core of everyone's faith is the collection of stories that we have come to know and believe. These stories shape us.

The stories in this little book are some of the Bible stories that were presented at the Biblical Storytelling Festival in November 2008. The Festival focused on Bible stories about food—eating, cooking, feeding and even one recipe. We were amazed at how many stories there are that have to do with food. So we selected some that are well known and some that are less familiar.

In addition to hearing the stories, another purpose of the Festival was to present stories in a variety of styles. Too often in Sunday worship, Scripture is read in a dull and uninteresting way. Our hope was to present Scripture in a variety of styles that people could take back to their congregations and use. One of the reasons for this booklet is to invite you to use some of this material, or to inspire you to prepare your own. All of the authors have given permission for you to use this material if you so choose. (Don't pass it off as your own, but a brief credit line is all that we ask.)

We are also happy to provide you with this window into some of the work that is being done at AMBS. The Bible is the centerpiece of study here. It informs our curriculum, it shapes our theology, and it gives purpose to our practical theology as well.

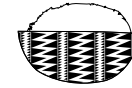
Enjoy this little volume. We suggest you read it out loud, one story at a time, giving yourself time to savor each morsel.

JUNE ALLIMAN YODER, D.MIN.
Professor of Communication and Preaching, AMBS
Teacher of the Biblical Storytelling class

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Nekeisha Alexis-Baker



A DAY IN BETHANY

LUKE 10:38-42

WRITTEN IN THREE PARTS

MARTHA'S STORY BY GAYLE GERBER KOONTZ

The thing is, I'm the eldest child and Mary is the youngest. You know the dynamics. Somebody has to be the responsible one.

Mary always was good at making friends, and I liked the way the house filled with talk and laughter when she brought them home. She'd offer to help mix extra pita dough for everyone—but then before it was time to steady the fire and bake them, she'd be off to one of the other girls' homes.

Today is one of those days when I wish I had another sister—maybe a twin. Jesus, bless his heart, arrived with—I don't know—10 or 15 friends, thirsty and dusty from the road. I love having him here—he has so much ... insight ... and a great sense of humor—but hospitality for that crowd is a stretch. Somebody has to make sure enough water is drawn. We have to catch one of those pesky chickens for a stew. And we don't have enough dishes, so that means borrowing some from the neighbors. We're out of pine nuts—that's a trip to the market. And sweeping the floor (which we didn't get to yesterday) isn't even on the list.

I'd like to be in the other room listening to what Jesus has to say too, but when he's finished and everyone's stomachs are growling, where do you think they'll turn? In my direction. And I don't see

how I'm going to get it all done without some more help. Since Mary doesn't seem to notice (sigh), I guess I'll just have to interrupt Jesus.

MARY'S STORY BY MARY H. SCHERTZ

You think I don't know *exactly* what Martha is thinking? It's not as though she's really subtle about those glares and long-suffering sighs, the pots and pans clanging just a little too hard—I mean, not so hard that Jesus would notice, I'm sure he thinks it's just the normal thing that happens in a kitchen, being a man and all, but I know what's going on.

Part of it, of course, is that it's not just today; it's how we grew up. Martha was always the competent one, the one who could make magic with her fingers, the one who can make those corners really shine. She can fix the cart, for Pete's sake, and get that stubborn mule to go. And Martha, well, Martha can take a few roadside flowers and stick them in a vase in a way that makes you catch your breath and look at them in a whole new way.

With Jesus, I don't feel like I have forty fingers and no thumbs. I'm not sure what it is, maybe the way he listens or maybe the way he talks right to me. I mean, I know he loves Martha, everybody does, and I saw how he stopped and really looked at her daisies this afternoon when he came in. But it's as if, it's almost as if, he thinks my questions and my ideas might be just as important, and maybe even just as beautiful, as Martha's flowers. It's not quite the first time, there was that one teacher a long time ago ... But ever since I got old enough to marry, it's as though that part of me has ceased to exist. Until now ... I can't go help Martha, not now ... I can't leave Jesus right now ... I wish Martha could understand that ...

MARY H. SCHERTZ is professor of New Testament.

JESUS' STORY BY JEFFREY NEWCOMER MILLER

My friends and I had been traveling all day. We met Martha at the village marketplace. Though Martha was very busy, she graciously invited all of us for dinner.

We were a big group. Dinner was taking a long time, and it was getting dark. We sat on the floor sipping tea, deep in conversation. Martha's sister, Mary, sat directly across from me. Mary's intent listening, questioning, and laughter were gifts of hospitality. So too were the delicious aromas wafting over from Martha's cooking fire.

Martha was angry when she came to speak with me. She asked if I even cared that Mary left her to work all by herself. She demanded that I force Mary to help her.

But I was angrier than Martha. I was angry that we make women work in the kitchen while we men get to sit around discussing scripture, faith and politics. Mary's contribution to our circle was important and welcome.

"Martha, Martha," I scolded her, "you are worried and distracted by many things; but few things are necessary. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

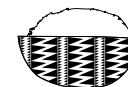
Quietly, I nudged the man next to me as the conversation continued around us. [Beckoning motion to audience] "Let's help Martha bring us our food. Let's make sure some others clean up after the meal."

JEFFREY NEWCOMER MILLER is AMBS admissions counselor.

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WHEN TOO MUCH IS NOT ENOUGH
 EXODUS 16 AND NUMBERS 11:4–35
 STEVE SCHWEITZER

CONTEXT *Eleazar and Tovah speaking (Aaron's son and his wife)*

TOVAH: Eleazar, dinner is ready!

ELEAZAR: [*walking into home*] Let me guess what we're having for dinner. Wait, wait, don't tell me: roasted quail and baked manna? Tovah, I know you try your best every day to spice up the same food, but it's been a solid month of variations on quail and manna. Is there anything else to eat?

TOVAH: [*a little upset*] Eleazar, you can try your culinary skills anytime. You know that it's been almost a month now since that flock of quails came in from the coast and just piled up around the camp. Zipporah told me that it was about three feet deep as far as the eye could see. Personally, if you want something else to eat, go ask your father, Aaron or—better yet—your uncle, Moses, to do something about it. After all, he prayed to God and got the quails—perhaps he could send them back.

ELEAZAR: That's a good idea, but, I do remember what happened the last time we complained: we got the quails, which sounded good, until everyone overindulged and felt

miserable after our first meal. Besides, the quails are only half the problem: then there's the manna.

TOVAH: And what's with that name—manna? When I first heard some of our neighbors using that word. I thought it was a joke—I mean, who would call something “what is it?” (Manna), but I guess “blanched coriander seed” doesn't have quite the same ring to it. When we saw those white wafers, we were certainly amazed.

ELEAZAR: Not as amazed as we were by Moses' instructions: Everyone collect one omer per person in your house, no more no less, each day for five days; on the sixth day, collect two omers per person, since there won't be any on the Sabbath. Those who didn't listen were sure surprised: I remember Zerah tried to gather extra that first day, and it just rotted the next morning, and sure enough when my friend went back out on the Sabbath, nothing. I guess he and his family didn't eat that day.

TOVAH: I can still hear Almah and her husband before these quails came: “Oh for the food of Egypt: cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, garlic. If only we had that instead of this lousy manna,” they said. They seemed to forget that we rarely enjoyed those luxuries in good ole Egypt—the house of slavery. Now, we have meat, and do we have meat, but is it enough? I mean, can we live on this stuff? It's a good thing our journey is almost over—that the land of Canaan is only a few days away. I heard that Moses is planning to send some spies into the land soon.

ELEAZAR: I heard the same thing. Hopefully, they'll have a good report and we can enter soon. I mean who would want to eat manna and quail every day? Just think, forty years from now, this month of the same diet of day after day will seem so long ago, as we're enjoying the food of Canaan.

TOVAH: Yeah, I couldn't imagine eating this for forty more days let alone for forty more years.

ELEAZAR: I look forward to eating those legendary grapes and barley we've heard about in the land.

TOVAH: For now, though, we have manna and quail. So, let's eat.

ELEAZAR: Tovah, I was just remembering that first day we saw the manna. Remember, Moses asked me to go out to collect an omer of manna to be saved as a memorial for future generations. Then, we built that huge Tabernacle, with the Ark of the Covenant. Aaron, my father, put the tablets of the Ten Words, that blooming almond rod, and the jar of manna—that I collected—into the Ark, to be kept forever. My small part matters. I just wonder what our descendants will think about this. What do you think, Tovah?

TOVAH: Eleazar, I think that we'll remember this as a story of God's provision in the desert, but that's not the whole story. It's the story of a people trying to survive and to thrive. I think we may have survived out here, but what have we lost? How many of our sons and daughters will die out here? What can two tablets, a rod, and a pot of white whatever-it-is teach them about God or what it's been like when too much is just not enough?

ELEAZAR: Tovah, you may be right, but somehow I don't think your version is going to be the “official” account. Perhaps we should eat before your delicious roasted quail gets cold.

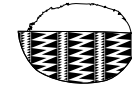
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EZEKIEL THE OBSERVANT

EZEKIEL 4

BRENT GRABER

Most of our problems result from not paying attention.

Adam ate from the tree. He was not paying attention.

Cain offered to God vegetables grown in the cursed earth. He was not paying attention.

My ancestors complained about Manna; Samson ate honey taken from a carcass; Jonah complained about the cucumber vine—they were not paying attention.

As a child, I learned that details matter.

“There is no forest without the trees,” my mother would say, “and no people without the law.”

I became so consumed with detail, that my friends gave me a nickname.

Ezekiel the Observant.

The Observant. Observers notice detail. And, of all the Observers—seers, prophets, dreamers, priests—of all the Observers, priests, it seemed, were the most respected.

So I became a priest.

BRENT GRABER is director of information technology.

I devoted myself to the teaching and keeping of the law; to maintaining the boundary between sacred and profane, between clean and unclean.

Then one day God spoke to me.

The instructions began reasonably enough: build a little Jerusalem out of brick, set a little siege wall against it, and a little siege ramp, and a little siege camp, and little battering rams all around. These, while not exactly your run-of-the-mill instructions, aren't especially peculiar by God's standards. And the detail suited me.

So there I was, making little models in the mud, when God told me to lie on my left side. For 390 days. One day for each year of the punishment of Israel, God said.

And then I was to turn over to the right side for 40 days, and lie with my face set against mini-Jerusalem. One day for each year of the punishment of Judah, God said.

And, to ensure that I didn't weaken and fail to honor the command, I was supposed to tie myself in place.

So I lay down, and realized that 430 is a lot of days, and, if God's math was right, a lot of punishment. More punishment, perhaps, than would be reasonable for a people that had already lived through so much. Besides which, I had not a thing to eat. And then God spoke a third time.

Gather wheat, barley, lentils, beans, millet, and spelt, mix it all together, and eat it as barley cakes, God said. Half a pound each day, God said.

And bake it with human dung.

Human dung! How absurd. How inappropriate. How ... unclean.

I have always paid attention to the details.

I know what a siege looks like, and I know what an army encampment looks like.

I know about the deceptiveness of spelt—how it grows everywhere but yields little, and how miserably difficult it is to hull.

I know what it is to harvest wheat, millet, beans, lentils, and barley.

I know how much work it will be to prepare half a pound of barley cake each day for the next 430 days. I know how desiccated my throat will be from eating it.

I know what it is to be a captive in a land not my own.

And I know what the law says about the presence of human fecal matter in the camp.

Quote: "You shall have a designated area outside the camp to which you shall go. With your utensils you shall have a trowel; when you relieve yourself outside, you shall dig a hole with your trowel and cover up your excrement. Because Adonai your God travels along with your camp, to save you and to hand over your enemies to you, therefore your camp must be holy, so that God may not see anything indecent among you and turn away from you."

"There is no people without the law."

So I reminded God of this—not only the fact that no human dung was to be in an army camp, let alone to be used as fuel for food; not only the fact that God's very law decreed this; not only the fact that I had been Observant my entire life, but also and especially the fact that the reason for disallowing human dung in the camp was that God was present to save us and hand over our enemies to us.

And here I am? Lying on my right side, setting my face against Jerusalem for 40 day-years after doing the same to Israel for 390 day-years?

Here I am? Tied to the ground, immobile, unclean, taking upon myself the complete and utter defeat of our people despite the promise of God's presence in our camp, despite having plenty of water and food to eat, and despite being Observant?

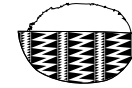
Here I am? Eating food cooked with human dung?

I pointed this out to God.

And God relented.

I used cow dung.

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EVEN A LITTLE IS ENOUGH

I KINGS 17:1-16

JUNE ALLIMAN YODER

PERFORMANCE NOTE *Three speaking parts with silent chorus and percussion*

NARRATOR

Things were going from bad to worse.

It was not bad enough that Ahab son of Omri became King of Israel.

It was not bad enough that Ahab son of Omri did more open evil
before God than anyone ever had.

Ahab was a new "Champion of Evil!"

It was not bad enough for him to copy the sins of those who went
before him.

Oh no, he had new ways of being evil!

It was not bad enough that Ahab married Jezebel.

It was not bad enough that Jezebel made Ahab worship Baal.

It was not bad enough that Ahab built a temple for Baal,
and a shrine to the sacred whore Asherah.

It was not bad enough that under Ahab's rule at the refortification of
Jericho

his firstborn son was sacrificed in the laying of the foundation,
and his youngest son was sacrificed at the setting up of the gates.

It is as if all this was not bad enough, and then to top it off Elijah the
Tishbite prophet confronted Ahab the King.

JUNE ALLIMAN YODER is professor of communication and preaching.

ELIJAH:

(to Ahab)

I said, "look Buster, as surely as the God of Israel lives, the next years are going to see a total drought.

Not one little bitty drop of dew or rain unless I ... moi ... say otherwise.

(to audience)

God told me to leave quickly and head toward the Kerith Ravine on the other side of the Jordan River. There I could drink water from the brook, and God promised to direct some ravens to feed me.

It was hard to trust that promise, but I went and camped and sure enough, ravens showed up bringing me breakfast and supper. How cool was that?

But, you have heard of the "trickle down effect." Well this was the "no trickle effect." Just when you thought things could not get worse, everything dried up including my brook, Because of the drought I had pronounced things were looking grim.

NARRATOR:

Yes, eventually the brook dried up. Then God spoke to Elijah and urged him to "get up and go to Zaraphath in Sidon. Plan to live there. I have given instructions to a widow who lives there, I told her to feed you."

ELIJAH:

So I got up and shuffled off to Zaraphath. Just as I got to the entrance of the village, I met a woman. I could tell by what she was wearing that she was a widow. And she could tell by what I was wearing that I was a prophet. She was gathering firewood.

I thought that was a good sign.

She must be cooking something.

So I asked her, "Please, would you give me a bit of water? I need a drink."

And when she turned to go get the water (wherever she was going to get water. There had been a drought for heaven's sake. There was no water! But I was thirsty so I asked her for a drink) I called to her and asked her to bring me something to eat as well.

WIDOW:

Can you believe it?

How much nerve do some people have?

Get me a drink, and by the way, while you are at it, get me something to eat.

Look Buster, I do not have so much as a biscuit.

I have a pitiful little handful of flour in a jar and a few sad drops of oil in a bottle;

You caught me scratching together enough firewood to make a last meal for my son and me.

After we eat it we will die.

ELIJAH:

Not to worry!

Do exactly as you said.

Gather wood,

Use up your flour and oil,

BUT...FIRST make a little biscuit for me and bring it here to me.

THEN go ahead and make a meal for you and your son with what is left.

Because this is the word of the God of Israel:

The jar of flour will not run out,

And the bottle of oil will not become empty before God sends rain on the land and ends this drought.

NARRATOR:

The Widow went and did what Elijah asked.

And it happened just as he said.

She and her family had plenty, for the jar of flour did not run out.
 And the bottle of oil did not become empty.
 God's promise was delivered to them exactly as Elijah had spoken it.

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THE BIGGEST BASH IN TOWN

JOHN 2:1-12
 MARY E. KLASSEN

For a little village like Cana, a wedding was the social highlight of the year. A little like a block party if the town has only one street and it's only one block long.

Everybody was there, camping out for the week-long festivities. Jesus' mother was in the middle of things, related somehow distantly to the groom's family. You know Mary. Like women do, stepping in wherever she's needed, making sure things go smoothly.

Jesus was invited, and since he had just added some new guys to his group of friends, Philip and Nathaniel, he brought them and the whole gang along. The more the merrier.

There they were, stretched out, feasting, telling stories about the groom's previous escapades, when Mary stepped up to Jesus and whispered, "They are out of wine."

Now there are some things in life you just don't ever want to do. You know a few of them. Don't spit into the wind, don't leave the house with holey underwear, don't talk back to your mother. And don't run out of liquid refreshment at a Jewish wedding. How embarrassing! More than embarrassing! The first day of the rest of your lifetime of bad luck.

Jesus seemed to think his mother was saying more than just,

MARY E. KLASSEN is director of communications.

“They are out of wine.” He was her son, after all. He had years of experience to hear inside his head what she didn’t need to say out loud: “Do something about it.”

“But poor planning on their part doesn’t constitute an emergency on my part,” Jesus said. “This isn’t my time.”

For sure. He wasn’t the steward, assigned to make sure there was food and drink for everyone for seven days. He wasn’t the groom, responsible to feed the multitude.

But Mary said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Not too far away were six stone jars for water, the kind they used for purification. With such a crowd on hand, the jars must have been empty. So many feet to wash.

Jesus motioned to the servants and pointed to the jars. “Fill them with water,” he said.

They looked at Jesus ... at the jars ... at Jesus. This was easier said than done. Those jars were made of stone! And each one could hold 20 to 30 gallons. So here were the servants, carrying flasks back and forth from the well to the jars, and there was the wedding steward, pacing back and forth, wondering where he should move to when it was all over.

At last the jars were full to the brim, and Jesus said, “Draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.”

Oh, boy. No one wanted to draw the short straw on that job. Water from the purification jars ... to the master of the banquet ... to drink? Oh, well, he’d never know where it came from.

He got ready to sip it and then ... that awesome bouquet ... that dry bite on his palette ... that smooth, warm glow down to the belly.

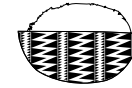
So right there in the middle of the feast, he marched over to chide the bridegroom. “Saving the best to the last really doesn’t work with wine, you know.” And then to himself, “Who would have thought the best is still to come?”

Only the disciples and the servants were in on it: Jesus as the back-up vintner for the biggest bash in town. Right there, under their noses, without saying magic words, Jesus did something we know about today. Imagine. What came out of those jars was not water for purification, but gallons and gallons of Gallo. More than enough to get them through the seven days. Hospitality unmatched. Joy overflowing.

Jesus didn’t even have a halo around his head. Or a big S hiding underneath his cloak.

Just a smile. And maybe words from his other parent sounding inside his head, “You are my son. I’m proud of you.”

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A PASSOVER TO REMEMBER

JOHN 13:1–17, LUKE 22:19–20 & MATTHEW 26:69–75

ROSANNA ELLER MCFADDEN

I remember that night clearly. It has been more than forty years, but I have thought of it every Passover since. I was just a girl then, only 12 years old, and now I tell this story to my grandchildren when we are gathered for the Seder meal.

We were not a wealthy family—oi, my mother could squeeze a denarii until Cesar himself would cry for mercy, but there were still nights we went to bed with empty stomachs. I had to work cleaning or cooking for families who had money and needed a girl with a strong back. Every day I was out running errands—I knew Jerusalem like a Pharisee knows the details of the law—every little street and back alley, and most of the people, definitely. And Passover, oi, such a busy time. So much cleaning, so much cooking, and always being sent to get things. It was also a time to be careful on the streets. The Romans [*spits*—I spit on the Romans—were, how to say ... nervous. So many people in Jerusalem from out of town for the festival, so much commotion, such an atmosphere of preparation and celebration. The Romans [*spits*] occupied our country, but they knew they could never occupy our hearts, especially on this most special night, when we remember how God delivered our people in the past. Definitely the Romans [*spits*] were nervous.

I was especially busy this day as my mother had a large group who had rented our upper room for their Seder. Thirteen people,

she said. I thought maybe a nice family: grandparents, a little boy to ask why this night was so special, maybe a girl my age ... but no, my mother said, thirteen men. Thirteen men! I said. Why aren't they home with their wives and children? A rabbi, she said, and twelve students. Oi, a rabbi and students—even worse! Maybe they walk around all day with their heads full of Torah, but by evening their feet stink like everyone else's. So much food we would need. So much bread, and extra wine, definitely. I hope they paid in advance.

We managed to get everything ready by sunset. Not a lot of bread, but enough. Not a lot of wine, but enough. I even had a tub with enough water to wash 26 dusty, smelly feet, definitely. They came in talking and arguing. I tried to stay out of the way; there would be plenty of work to do later on. But the rabbi, he did a strange thing. While the students were arguing and finding their places around the table, he took off his outer robe, and picked up the basin and cloth which I had laid out, and he, the rabbi, began to wash their smelly feet. I had never seen a rabbi do that, definitely. The students thought it was strange, too. A big man stood up and argued. He was not from Jerusalem—from somewhere up north, Galilee, maybe. I could tell by his accent. Anyway, this big man argued, but the rabbi he spoke to him and washed his feet anyway.

The meal was special as the Seder is always special. My mother's good food, remembering the Passover story and our deliverance. The hopes and dreams of our people, even in the face of the Romans [*spits*]. At the end of the meal, the rabbi did an even stranger thing: he took a piece of bread and tore it in two and said, "This is my body, broken for you. When you eat it, remember me." And he took the cup of wine and said, "This is my blood, given for you. When you drink it, remember me." What could that mean? I know the Seder wine is blood, but it is the blood of the Passover Lamb, not human blood. And what body was broken? It made no sense to me. This was the strangest rabbi I had ever seen—and I have seen a few.

But, as always at Passover there was much work to do: tables to clear, dishes to wash, floors to clean—not just for these men, but for other families my mother cooked for, too. I worked until very late that night. It was dark and cold as I went home through the back

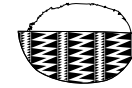
streets, being careful to avoid any Romans [*spits*]. There was often a fire in the courtyard of the High Priest's house, so I stopped there to warm myself. There was a group of people standing around the fire, talking politics, wondering how the Romans [*spits*] would punish us for celebrating Passover. I realized they were talking about the rabbi who had just been eating my mother's food in our room with his friends. In fact, one of his friends was there—the big man who didn't want his feet washed—but he wasn't saying anything. A servant girl asked him, "Aren't you one of the ones who was with him?" "No, it wasn't me," he said. And someone else asked, "Weren't you with the Galilean?" and he said "I don't know what you're talking about." But I knew he was lying; I had seen him eating with the rabbi in my house, that night. And I recognized his northern accent. "You are one of his friends, and you have a Galilean accent!" I said. And he looked at the faces around the fire and said, "I swear I do not know this man!" And then he stared at me, and suddenly I was very cold. And then a rooster crowed. And this big man he looked like someone had kicked him in the stomach, but no one had touched him. He almost fell to his knees; I thought he was going to be sick. And then he stood up and turned and walked away, and I turned and made my way home as the sun was rising. It had been the strangest night, definitely.

Maybe you have heard the rest of the story. The Romans [*spits*] crucified this rabbi. It was just as he said that night: his body was broken and his blood was given. Bread and wine. Such ordinary things, so much meaning. Every Passover I remember, and I wonder. I wonder this year especially, this year when the Romans [*spits*] have destroyed our Temple. How will we be delivered now? How can we survive when the things we love the most are taken from us?

They said that all his friends left him, even the ones who ate with him that night. The Romans [*spits*] beat him and taunted him and spit on him and nailed him on a cross. And yet somehow, he forgave them. He forgave his friends who ran away, even the man I saw across the fire who pretended not to know him. He even forgave his enemies, the Romans [*spits*] who killed him like a criminal. So much forgiveness, so much love to come out of that broken body and spilled blood. So now, when I sit at the Seder meal with my grandchildren and wonder if there will be enough for us, I look at

the bread and I look at the wine, and I know that this rabbi, he had so much more forgiveness than I can imagine. And sometimes, when I tell my grandchildren how he forgave even those who killed him, those who destroyed our Temple and want to destroy our hope; how he forgave the Romans ... I am so overwhelmed, I forget even to spit.

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PETER GETS IT

ACTS 10:1–35

KEN HAWKLEY

Reader 1 comes on stage alone. Looks around, shrugs and clears his throat, getting ready to read. Suddenly three others come running on stage. Shuffle and scuffle to get into a line beside Reader 1, pass papers back and forth, finally get settled and all three turn to Reader 1 and smile.

READER 1: Who are you people?

READER 2: Hi, I'm Cloris. (waves)

READER 3: My name's Boris. (nods)

READER 4: And I'm Delores. (curtsies)

READER 2: We're the chorus.

READER 3: Can't ignore us.

READER 4: Are you against us or are you for us?

(The three nod to one another. They think they are pretty hot stuff.)

READER 1: Will you stop!

(The three are startled into a straight line)

KEN HAWKLEY is associate director of development.

READER 2: We heard you praying for help to tell this stor–EE. (*slight emphasis on the final EE sound*)

READER 3: You only asked for one other person, but we thought you could use three. (*slight emphasis on the final EE sound*)

READER 4: And we like to do things differentlee. (*slight emphasis on the final EE sound*)

READER 1: (*regards the trio, turns to audience*) Definitely not what I had in mind.

READER 4: Which bring us to the present Scripture story—

READER 3: Of Cornelius and Peter and about God’s glory—

READER 2: And how Peter learned you sometimes get more than you ask for–EE.

READER 2,3,4: (*Looking at Reader 1 a bit sheepishly.*) Sorry. We just like to rhyme.

READER 3: One day, in the city of Caesarea—

READER 4: In a section of Caesarea—

READER 2: A Caesarean section—

(*The three laugh and high-five each other with remarks like, “Good one!” “Oh that was a zinger!” “Your really snuck it in there.”*)

READER 1: Stick to the story.

(*The 3 become serious. They play it straight—for a while*)

READER 3: In Caesarea, a man named Cornelius was praying.

READER 2: Cornelius was a centurion and a gentile,

READER 4: But he was a God fearing man.

READER 1: While he was praying,

READER 2: He got more than he bargained for.

READER 3: God spoke to him.

READER 4: “I have heard your prayer.”

READER 1: “Send a couple of your guys to see my man, Peter.”

READER 2: “He’ll be expecting you.”

READER 3: “He lives in the town of Joppa,”

READER 4: “In the house of Simon the tanner,”

READER 1: “Who lives by the seaside.”

READER 2: These were the directions given to Cornelius,

READER 3: A kind of heavenly Mapquest.

READER 4: And Cornelius sent two servants off and running—

READER 1: To find this stranger named Peter.

(*pause*)

READER 1: Meanwhile,

READER 2: Many miles away,

READER 3: In Joppa,

READER 4: In the house of Simon the Tanner,

READER 2: In the house by the seaside,

READER 3: On the roof of the house by the seaside,

READER 4: Peter was praying.

READER 2: It was high noon and Peter was hungry.

READER 3: He ordered a light lunch and waited.

READER 1: He fell asleep and dreamed. In his dream the heavens opened.

READER 4: And something like a sheet came down,

READER 2: Filled with all kinds of disgusting things,

READER 3: Snakes,

READER 4: Lizards,

READER 2: Pigeons,

READER 3: Garbanzo beans—

READER 1: Stop! The Bible does not mention garbanzo beans.

READER 3: Well garbanzos are disgusting.

READER 4: Yeah, they can really give you ...

READER 1: Never mind! Just stick to the Bible story.

READER 2: There were all kinds of four footed animals on the sheet.

READER 3: *(as an aside to the other 2)* Luckily, there were no garbanzo beans.

READER 1: God said to Peter, "You wanted lunch—kill something and eat."

READER 4: Peter said, "Are you kidding? This stuff is disgusting."

READER 1: God said,

READER 2: "You are hungry—so eat."

READER 3: "I say that this is OK, don't call it disgusting."

READER 4: "Just take one bite—you'll like it!"

READER 2: Peter really had something else in mind—

READER 3: Like falafel and date pudding,

READER 4: Or a goat milk and fig milkshake.

READER 1: This sheet of disgusting animals was clearly not what he asked for;

READER 2: God supplied something completely different—
(Looks at Reader 1)

READER 3: In abundance. *(Looks at Reader 1)*

READER 4: And if Peter would only give it a chance—
(Looks at Reader 1)

READER 1: I get it, I get it. *(pause)* This vision happened not once,

READER 2: Not twice,

READER 3: But thrice.

READER 4: That's nice. *(Gives thumbs up to the other two.)*

READER 2: Peter awoke;

READER 3: The spell was broke.

READER 1: *(turns sternly to the trio)* NO!

READER 4: *(looking at Reader 1 innocently)* And the men Cornelius had sent knocked on the door of Simon the tanner.

READER 2: God said to Peter,

READER 3: "There are men downstairs looking for you."

READER 1: "Go with them."

READER 4: "I have sent them."

READER 3: The men told Peter about Cornelius,

READER 1: And that an angel had directed them to Peter,

READER 4: So that Peter could visit Cornelius, who wanted to hear what Peter had to say—

READER 2: About God—

READER 3: About faith—

READER 4: About Jesus.

READER 2: So off they went.

READER 4: And when Peter met Cornelius,

READER 1: He told Peter about the vision he had had and how it came that he sent for Peter.

READER 2: Peter said,

READER 1: "You are a Gentile,"

READER 3: "I am a Jew."

READER 1: "Its against the law—"

READER 4: "To associate with you."

READER 1: "But now my vision—"

READER 2: "Gives me a clue."

(All look at one another. Reader 1 smiles and gives a thumbs up to the trio)

READER 4: In power and might our dear Peter preached.

READER 3: To Cornelius's household the Holy Spirit reached.

READER 2: The gap between Jew and Gentile was breeched.

READER 1: *(Like he is quoting Shakespeare)* And they were all baptized way down at the beach. *(The trio stare at him. He looks at them)* What?

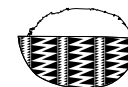
READER 3: They WERE baptized, but "way down at the beach"?

READER 1: I ... was ... trying ... to ... rhyme.

READER 2: *(Looks at the others)* God sure does work in mysterious ways.

READER 4, READER 3: *(To the audience)* And that's how the story of Cornelius plays.

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FEEDING THE MANY

MATTHEW 14:13–21

JUNE ALLIMAN YODER

Jesus was one of the first to be told that John the Baptist had been beheaded. John—his cousin, his friend, and his colleague—the one whose task it was to prepare the way.

Jesus was deeply saddened by the news. He needed a place of quiet and solitude where he could mourn John's death. He withdrew in a boat to be by himself. But somebody saw him, and the word got out that Jesus was heading to a nearby lakeside village.

When Jesus came ashore, he was greeted by a crowd of people. Jesus had compassion on them and went into the crowd to heal their sick. The rest of the day he spent with them healing the sick and comforting the sorrowful.

As it began to be evening, the disciples came to Jesus and expressed to him their concern. "We are in the middle of no place here and it is beginning to get dark. We have discussed this among ourselves and we think you need to tell the people that they need to get going so they can get to the surrounding villages and get something to eat."

Jesus replied to the disciples: "They don't need to go anywhere. You give them something to eat."

The disciples were dumbfounded. How in the world were they

going to do that? They had only seen five loaves—more like rolls—and two little fish. That would not even feed the front row with so many people present.

The story tells us there were 5,000 men, not counting women and children, but why wouldn't you count the women and children when it comes to food? 5,000 men, each with a wife, so we now have 10,000 people. Archaeological anthropologists tell us that the average family had five to six children, so that is an additional 25,000. A total of 35,000ish or about the number of people in the town of Goshen.

That is a lot of people. No wonder the disciples were overwhelmed. But the disciples responded to Jesus' command that they find food to feed the multitude.

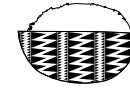
While the disciples were looking for the bread and fish, Jesus clearly directed the crowd to sit on the grass. They were to sit in groups of fifty to a hundred. I will let you do the math, but it was lots of people and lots of groups. The disciples returned and presented him with five loaves and two fish.

Jesus took the five loaves and two fish; he looked up to heaven; he blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples.

And the disciples walked into the crowd of men and women and children to give them some bread. But they discovered that the people were already eating. In these circles of 50 and 100 there were many families who brought food baskets with them. Well, the women brought food—for their families. There was no food only if you were a man disciple counting only the men. There were lots of baskets of food that day. The miracle was the sharing of the food; the generosity of spirit; food given to Jesus for his blessing.

Everyone ate and everyone was satisfied. And they gathered 12 basketsful of leftovers. I feel confident the baskets were baskets that the women brought.

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