

Enough?

## Jesus and a little boy vs. the voices of common sense

By [Barbara Cawthorne Crafton](#)

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*Bread summer is upon us. Few lectionary preachers are thrilled about coming up with five consecutive sermons on [John 6](#), the bread of life discourse. You may decide that in Year B, the 17th through 21st Sundays in Ordinary Time are a fine time for preaching on the Old Testament or epistle readings, going off the lectionary or welcoming guest preachers. But Barbara Cawthorne Crafton has agreed to write five posts focusing only on the Gospel of John readings. She'll also be including a bread recipe with each—use this for communion, or a snack to get you through a late Saturday night of especially difficult sermon writing—Ed.*

There is enough. In fact, there is more than enough. Jesus knows this, but nobody else seems to. Why would they? They can count—five loaves and two fish versus all those people. So it's just Jesus and the little boy against all the voices of common sense.

One of the hardest things about life together in an institution like the church is the tension between the responsibility of leadership and the possibility of vision. Being a leader forces a person to become very protective of what *is*, but that very protectiveness can make it hard to respond to what *might be*. One can become such a good custodian of the past and the present that the future is unimaginable except in the terms of what we already know.

The future is by definition unknowable: you can make educated guesses about it based on what you know, but there will always be an element you cannot predict. What makes selling a vision for the future especially hard is that you can bet that some of your usual supporters won't support you. They can't, because you can't give them a diagram or a photograph of a vision. Your vision throws them back upon their

trust in you, and this is hard on them and on you.

Have you been faithful and dependable in the past? Do they know you want the good things they want? How willing will they be to follow you into something neither you nor they can fully predict?

Here, Jesus relies exclusively on that kind of trust. He doesn't "bring them along" or "get them on the same page" in any of the ways a management consultant might advise someone who hopes to be what the consultant would call "a change agent." Without explanation, Jesus tells the bewildered disciples to sit the people down and distribute an amount of food that is clearly not enough. They obey. Don't try this at a vestry meeting.

It may well be that some of the people to whom you will preach on this passage are dealing with the challenge of an unknowable institutional future right now. Maybe you've butted heads about it at meetings, meetings in which you've pleaded for them to have the courage to walk into the future and they've dragged their feet. Or maybe you've been the foot-dragger, uncomfortable in the role of The One Who Doesn't Want Change but aware that you are responsible to a wider swath of the community than they are. Maybe you wish that you could always Just Do It. But you can't, not always.

Maybe this is simply where we live: in the tension between the gaps in our own courage and the gaps in the courage of others, prisoners alternately of our own lack of imagination and that of others. That's why we arrange our common life with the checks and balances we have and why organizational change can be so slow. The impatience we feel is built into them.

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This summer offers five straight weeks of gospel readings about bread, which ought to just about do it for our bread needs. Accordingly, each of my five posts will include a bread recipe. Here is this week's:

### **Whole Wheat Bread**

Sprinkle 1 envelope active dry yeast over 1 cup warm water. Stir and let stand while you mix 2 cups hot milk, 1/2 cup honey and 1tsp salt, using a

mixer with a dough hook or a stout spoon. Add the yeast mixture.

Begin adding flours, mixing in 1 cup at a time: 1 cup white flour, 4 cups whole wheat. You may also substitute other grains in this: 1 cup corn meal, 1 cup oatmeal (which helps gentle the texture a bit) or other grains.

Add more flours and mix until dough is stiff, then knead with hook or by hand until smooth and elastic, 8-10 minutes. In all you may be adding 6-7 cups of flours; it's difficult to be exact.

Turn the mixture into a greased large bowl and cover with a towel. Let rise in a warm place until double, about 90 minutes. Punch down and turn out onto board. Divide into two equal portions and shape into two loaves. Place in loaf pans, cover and let rise again, about 45 minutes. Bake at 375° for 30 minutes, or until nice and golden.

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