

She is not much.

Despite her plump cheeks, Delilah Chloe Durek is still just a tiny thing, only a few months old.

I met with her and her family yesterday; she's not much of a conversationalist.

I told her many important things about Jesus that she didn't seem to care about.

The privileges and responsibilities of church membership didn't interest her nearly as much as her binky or her stuffed rabbit.

How can I set her for baptism before a hundred people?

Outside the door clamor thousands: impressive crowds, successful and starving, desperate and important; what is little Delilah among so many people?

The boy's offering of barley and fish was not much...and that's a kind way of saying it.

Not only was the quantity meager, but so was the quality.

Barley loaves sold for about a third the price of wheat bread; only the poor ate barley.

The word for fish isn't the one usually used in Greek, but is a trade word for cooked, preserved, pantry shelf fish...something between pickled herring and canned tuna.

It wasn't fresh or fancy or expensive.

But I suspect that it meant plenty to the boy who carried it along the lakefront, whoever he was, wherever he was going, a child among adults, with or without his parents, a tiny face too insignificant to notice, a forgettable fragment of the crowd.

What is he among so many people?

He is not much, and neither is the meal he has cobbled together and carried now to Andrew, an offering that makes the Little Drummer Boy look like one of the Wise Men by comparison.

Yet he does with his not much exactly what Delilah's parents do with her.

The little boy's meal, and the little girl, are placed in the hands of Jesus.

This, of course, is an enormous gamble, whether the parents or the peasant boy know it or not.

Maybe they do it with eagerness and joy.

Maybe they do it out of a vague sense of obligation.

Maybe they do it through clenched teeth, buckling to surrounding pressure but reluctant to share what means the world to them but means almost nothing to the world.

Maybe they do it despite worries of embarrassment, like the servant with Elisha or Andrew with Jesus, because this is all they have to give, and they know it's not much.

There are so many possibilities and powerful personal movements of the heart whenever we give God an offering that means something to us, something significant enough that we can call it first fruits.

And what will Jesus do with our gift?

Will he give it to his disciples to mishandle?

Will its significance to us be lost, swallowed up to feed the insatiable starvation of a world which has no appreciation for it or for us?

Dare we put our precious not much in other hands, whether it is our daughter or our dinner or our dollars or our life...a life the crowds will probably never notice, but the only life we have? It's fine to drop disposable income into the plate or drop off old clothes and yesterday's unwanted fragments on the church's doorstep in hopes that someone will redirect them to some kid who can't afford a decent meal...but when money is tight and hope is scarce and life is fragile, do we dare lift what we most treasure and must treasure into God's hands and then let go?

It will make no difference to the crowds...a baby baptized won't help Chicago any more than a handful of dollar store groceries will nourish a rock concert...but it makes a huge difference to us.

We already know the danger of turning over the treasure to Jesus.

It will go to someone else.

Jesus never does what we want him to.

He won't become our king, he won't get in the boat, he won't follow through on any of our good ideas for him.

Instead, Jesus will take what is dear to us and give it away, freely and indiscriminately, to the unappreciative crowds, to a world that consumes but doesn't contribute or care, to people who grab but don't give.

The money we give to church will go to the wider church or to some other cause.

The pastor's time will be squandered on non-members.

The secrets we share with each other will be leaked as morsels of gossip, pieces of our hearts served as scraps and appetizers for the perverse enjoyment of strangers with dirty hands.

The time and effort we offer will be overlooked and exploited and unappreciated and lost.

But that is only if Jesus' helpers get their clumsy mitts on it.

If our treasure goes directly to Jesus, things may be worse.

Watch what happens to the high quality loaves at Holy Communion today.

They will be taken and blessed, then broken and distributed.

It is what Jesus does with all our offerings.

It is what Jesus will do with Delilah.

She will be taken and blessed.

Jesus will give thanks for her and raise her to the sky, showing God in heaven and all the watching world the most beautiful gift he has ever seen.

And then, she will be broken.

She will be sent out into the rapacious crowds as part of the body of Christ, which is what we call our broken bread and our broken selves, named after the broken Christ on the cross, God's invaluable and unappreciated gift to us.

Delilah will be given away as a gift to a world that needs the love in her eyes and the beauty in her soul and the nourishment sown and growing inside of her and the goodness that God knows is hidden inside her because God put it there.

No doubt she will pass through grubby hands and greedy fingers; no doubt she will be trampled and bruised by her passage through the world.

Adolescence and adulthood and aging will find ways to break and consume her.

Terrible, unseemly things will happen in her life, blessed and beloved though she be, because the crowds don't care, and because Jesus cares too much.

And what will become of Delilah, and the boy's barley, and all the paltry but precious offerings we give, cheerfully and fearfully, eagerly and reluctantly, into God's hands?

*When the crowds were satisfied, Jesus told his disciples,
"Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost."*

A little bit of barley becomes food enough for thousands.

A little bitty baby becomes a blessing for countless people for countless years.

The possibility hidden within the humble is released, and touched by the hands of God, not much is transformed into more than enough.

The crowds are transformed too, from curious to satisfied...and in case you missed it, the miracle is not that so many people were fed with so little, but that so many people, at the same time, were actually *satisfied*.

All of this is the mysterious work of God; the disciples have nothing to do with it.

Those of us who follow Jesus with earnest intentions get quagmired in the budget questions and stuck in the math, always counting more heads than resources, more need than we have the time or money to address to our standards.

We get stuck in the front of the story, and forget that our real job is to gather up the fragments, to attend to the abundance, to make sure that in wild economy of grace, nothing is lost.

No offering ever given to God is lost.

God cares far too much about us to squander any gift we give, even if it is as poor as a child's paper ornament or a pauper's lunch.

Delilah, gift from God, gift to God, you will be blessed, and you will be broken.

You will be multiplied in mysterious and marvelous ways.

You will be a part of the body of Christ, the only miracle that will ever be able to satisfy the world.

You will be delicious and devoured, frustrated and fragmented.

But you will not be lost.

You are far, far too valuable to God ever to be lost.

With us all, you will be gathered up.