

August 2, 2020
New Song Episcopal Church
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(All lectionary passages are included below the sermon text.)

Something worth sharing

There are only two miracles that are mentioned in all four Gospels. The resurrection is one. The feeding of the 5,000 is the other. That is significant and probably means that we should pay attention. As I ponder this, I have to acknowledge that I am doing so in the context of a global pandemic, so let's start there.

Covid. I'm tired of hearing that word. I know it's not going away, though. But it drains me. It is draining all of us in some way or another (or many...).

We are tired of social distancing, some people are tired of it to the extent of participating in extremely risky behavior.

We are tired of the financial stresses of job losses, economic inactivity, renter protections that ended yesterday while Congress went on a break.

We are tired of worrying about whether our kids are going to be safe.

We are tired of losing people we love and seeing still others get sick.

We're tired.

At the beginning of this passage, in verse 13, Jesus was tired and withdrew himself in a boat alone to get some needed rest.

But the crowds saw him, they found him. They followed him to where he landed.

We all have those moments when it seems like we are being pulled this way and that and we try to escape to do some self-care only to be interrupted with another request.

How do you react? Don't answer that out loud. It may be similar to how I react far too often: with a deep sigh of resignation (either internally or even out loud) or

maybe a frustrated, “What?!” as in “What now?!”

That’s not how Jesus reacts in the Gospels. His response is always one of compassion. He sees people’s helplessness, sees their need, sees their hopelessness and desperation and he is moved to action.

He saw the great crowd and had compassion for them. In fact, he ministered to their needs for so long that his disciples noted that the hour was late and no one had eaten. Jesus, “[S]end the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.”

They don’t have to go away; you feed them.

What?! FIVE THOUSAND people? How?? We have nothing here but some small loaves and a couple fish. The disciples were tired. Their resources were exhausted. They could not meet the need in front of them.

“Bring them [the loaves and fish] to me,” Jesus says.

This is where theologians often move into a discussion of a *theology of scarcity* versus a *theology of plenty*. That’s a dry way of saying that we could look at this situation one of two ways:

- We don’t have enough or
- We have something worth sharing.

Faith is a repeated theme throughout the scriptures. We are exhorted to trust in the one who made everything, who rules all, who sees and cares about things as small as a sparrow that falls dead. The one who says not to worry because each of us is “worth more than many sparrows.”

As I look around during this pandemic I see things people around me need: Hope, love, encouragement, resources, advocacy, a listening ear.

But I’m so tired. I want to go across the lake in a boat by myself to a deserted

place. Sometimes I get to do so. Sometimes, there are needs I can meet that take precedence. Sometimes, there are even needs greater than I can meet that I am invited to participate in meeting.

This is why the disciples are such an important part of this story. They knew their resources, and according the account in John's Gospel, these were supplied by a small boy. They weren't even originally the disciples' loaves and fish!

In the times when we feel spent, those are the times we are invited to gratefully accept resources offered to us by others and let them pass through our hands, blessed by God, to supply needs beyond imagination.

Instead of looking at what we have and deciding it isn't enough, we can choose to have compassion and decide that what we have is worth sharing.

Is it adequate? It's what I have.

We give what we have, in faith that our needs will be supplied, and we trust that God will fill in the gaps.

After all the people were fed, twelve baskets full of food were collected.

Was it a supernatural miracle? Perhaps.

Was it rather a miracle of a theology of scarcity being overcome by a theology of plenty, where people saw the generosity of a small kid, saw Jesus pray, saw the disciples act, and then decided they should also share? Also possible.

Which one is more difficult?

Amen.

Old Testament

Isaiah 55:1-5

Thus says the Lord:

"Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;

and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.

Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.

See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.

See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you."

The Response

Psalm 145: 8-9, 15-22

Exaltabo te, Deus

8 The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, *
slow to anger and of great kindness.

9 The LORD is loving to everyone *
and his compassion is over all his works.

15 The LORD upholds all those who fall; *
he lifts up those who are bowed down.

16 The eyes of all wait upon you, O LORD, *
and you give them their food in due season.

17 You open wide your hand *
and satisfy the needs of every living creature.

18 The LORD is righteous in all his ways *
and loving in all his works.

19 The LORD is near to those who call upon him, *
to all who call upon him faithfully.

20 He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; *
he hears their cry and helps them.

21 The LORD preserves all those who love him, *
but he destroys all the wicked.

22 My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD; *
let all flesh bless his holy Name for ever and ever.

The Epistle

Romans 9:1-5

I am speaking the truth in Christ-- I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit-- I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

The Gospel

Matthew 14:13-21

Jesus withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.