

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 14:13-21

The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is probably one of the best known stories of the Gospels. In this story, we find Jesus seeking peace and quiet, he wants to be alone after the death of John the Baptist. But the crowds follow him on foot, they just couldn't get enough of Jesus, they couldn't leave him alone, even for a time of peace and quiet. Jesus could find no quiet time to himself when he most wanted it. The crowds, the thousands of men, women, and children, were relentless.

Yet, instead of reacting with anger, Jesus saw the crowds and had compassion on them. The word compassion meant that Jesus felt for them in the very core of his being. So when the disciples suggested sending the hungry crowds away to find food, Jesus responded with mercy and love that you can almost hear in his voice, "They need not go away, you give them something to eat".

The disciples are baffled, what can they do? Out of the crowds they find five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus blessed the food, broke the loaves, and passed the food to the crowds. In the end, about five thousand men, not counting the women and the children eat until they are full, and there are even twelve baskets of broken pieces of food left over. A miraculous display of Jesus' power, a miraculous story of feeding the hungry. And yet, the story takes us still further than that, teaching us many lessons from this miraculous feeding.

In this story, Jesus teaches us about our responsibility to care for

others because of our faith. Jesus' first response at hearing of John the Baptist death is to retreat and spend some time alone.

Most people would agree that spending some down time just for one's self is important, a healthy way to respond to stress and grief. But Jesus puts aside his own needs in order to respond to the needs of others. He gives up his quiet time, in order to meet the crowds pressing in on him. The crowds, hungering both spiritually and physically, represent everything from which Jesus wants to retreat. He has withdrawn to 'recharge his batteries'.

But he does not turn them away. Jesus found it impossible to turn a blind eye toward the need of others in order to meet one's own needs of rest, refueling, spiritual recharging. Even now, when he needs rest for himself so greatly, he cannot fail to help those who come to him. Instead of finding his strength in peace and quiet, Jesus finds his strength, his joy, in being with the people.

Can we do the same? When we feel we've nothing left to give, when we feel spent, spiritually and physically, can we still give more? Jesus calls us to respond as he did, by giving more, loving more, and even more than we think we can bear. Like Jesus, we can find our strength and our peace in the very act of working for others, we can find our selves by serving the crowds who are in need.

But this story holds even more for us: The disciples' response to the hungry crowds, is a response we've often heard, one we've often felt like using ourselves, "what can we do?" we ask. "We have nothing here to give, but five loaves and two fish".

The disciples are overwhelmed by the crowds, there are too many people, they have too little to offer. We can almost imagine Jesus' groan of frustration with the disciples, they still don't get it. Jesus wants the disciples to step up into their roles

of leadership, he wants them to initiate the response to the crowds. But they are too limited in what they see, they only see how big of a crowd there is and how little the amount the food is, and they see no possible solutions. The disciples want to use their limited resources as an excuse for inaction: so many people, so little food. But Jesus refuses to let this be their response, he makes things happen with what little they have, he finds a way to feed everyone.

Too often, we can be overwhelmed like the disciples, we look at our small selves and think how little we have to offer, how little we can do. How can we possibly make changes in the world when we are so small, when we have so little to work with?

What can we do? We respond, like the disciples, “we have nothing here!” But in doing so, we shortchange ourselves and God, rejecting, by our inaction, the gifts which God gives to us.

If we say there is nothing we can do, then we are in fact saying that God has not given us enough, or good enough. Jesus shows us that we just need to use what we have, put some heart and faith behind it, and watch miracles take place. We ask, “what good will our little bit do?” But Jesus’ answer is always the same, to the one cup of cold water offered to a child, to the one widow’s mite, to the five loaves of bread. The answer Jesus gives is, “Let’s see what good we can do here”.

We can wonder about the miracle portrayed in the story of this miracle, did Jesus really work supernaturally to create more loaves and more fish? Did he simply by his actions, encourage others to share their loaves and fish that they didn't want to give up at first? These questions are historically interesting, but they miss the real point: thousands and thousands of men, women, and children were fed until they can eat no more, with just a minimum amount of food.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could do that with the world's hungry today, especially in the drought stricken areas of our world? It is stories like this that must keep starving societies going and hoping against all odds, hoping for a miracle such as the one in our Gospel for today.

But what happened that day, as much as anything else, was a miracle of redistribution. Instead of one person having five loaves and two fish, everybody could have something to eat. Instead of one person having it all, everyone got a share.

Through Jesus, things were redistributed, reordered, so that everyone was taken care of.

Following Jesus asks us if we are willing to give up some of what we have, that others might not go hungry? Are we willing to give out of what God has given to us? These are tough questions, but Jesus encourages us, saying, give your five loaves, and I will see that thousands are fed with them. Always remember that we don't act alone, but with God, in Christ, and miracles can, and still do, happen in our world today.

AMEN.