

Exodus 16:22-26
July 31, 2011

Matthew 14:13-21
St. James U.C.C.

More Than Enough
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This story must have been important because it appears in all four of the gospels it contains a message we need to hear again and again. From this point on in Matthew's gospel, we see Jesus' earthly ministry becoming less and less public; as the personal training of his disciple's receives more and more of his attention. This story of compassion begins in an experience of grief. "When Jesus heard the news about John, he left there in a boat and went to a lonely place by himself. The people heard about it, and so they left their towns and followed him by land." Does "it" refer to where Jesus had gone, or was "it" the news of John's death? Galilee was a small country so it must have been difficult to find a place to be alone. He probably borrowed a boat from one of his friends to seek solace on the other side of the lake because it was only 8 miles wide. Jesus seeks rest in withdrawal from community, but the crowds followed. It was easy to see the boat set sail and to figure out where it was going and they followed and were on the other side when Jesus arrived.

In Matthew compassion compels action; Jesus felt not only his own pain but the pain of others in John's death. Compassion is not mere attitude – compassion engages faith in action. Imagine how Jesus felt when John was beheaded. Elizabeth's Mary's kinswoman son, John, who baptized Jesus. Was He seeking time to be alone with his own grief? Was He concerned with his own impending death? Was He seeking rest for his body and strength for what was ahead? We can speculate but we will never know the answers.

It could be all of the above but he was not to get it. When he saw the crowd, he took the time to heal them, talk to them and to feed them before they returned home. Jesus never found anyone a nuisance, even when his whole being was crying out for rest and quiet and neither must his followers.

The disciples wanted to send people away from Jesus. We see here where the disciples would have closed Jesus off from the community but Jesus choose the community to be opened in ministry to others. The disciples see only the scarcity of their own resources. They find themselves called to trust God's abundance, abundance that they cannot see.

Jesus tells the disciples to bring the meager gift of five loaves and two fishes to him. Can you imagine the disciples? How can five loaves and 2 fishes feed a hungry crowd of 5,000 not including women and children? Think of the words Jesus said take, bless, break and give. The same words we say at communion, Jesus took the gifts from God, blessed them and shared. Then as now, God uses ordinary elements of life to provide extraordinary grace for living. Whether in fish and loaves, or bread and wine all may eat, all may be filled.

Jesus set aside his Sabbath rest when the crowd came. The disciples were called to set aside their reliance on their own resources. And what results from such compassion? The twelve remaining baskets recall another feeding in Exodus 16:22-26 where Moses told his people to gather manna for 6 days and rest on the Sabbath. Some of the people disobeyed and when out on the seventh day and didn't find any food. The God spoke to Moses telling him that the people must rest on the seventh day and he would provide. The people didn't work and God provided for the seventh day.

Some time ago I was asked to bring communion to the bedside of a person, his wife and two family members. When we began communion there were four people in the room, people began coming in as we began and I thought we are not going to have enough. Some how, some way we shared the juice and the bread and had enough for everyone. Was God present, you bet, because I could not have figured it out?

These stories are here to remind us of something that believing people have found to be true throughout the centuries: that "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27). I believe that what we do with impossible situations of life can be summed up in the words of Jesus found in Matthew 14:17 "Bring them here to

me”. Jesus doesn’t give us a magic formula to solve our problems on our own. Rather, he gives us himself and invites us to cast our care on him.

When the disciples brought the small lunch to Jesus, he didn’t simply turn it into a banquet. He seemed to go through a process that took time and that involved obedience to him. First he had all the people sit down. If we look in Mark it tells us that they sat in ranks, in hundreds and fifties Mark 6:43. They were in organized groups before they were fed. Did he want them to fellowship with each other before they were fed and share their stories?

Second, Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish. Looking towards them he gave his blessing. He took the time to thank God and to let the people know that it was God who provided. Even though it was small he wanted to let the people know that he placed worship of God over the urgency to eat.

Then third he had his disciples distribute the loaves and fishes. The disciples had said this was impossible but by letting them distribute was this including them in the miracle? By distributing the food they must have been in awe and wonder and seen that everyone had a feast both literally and spiritually.

We are an impatient people. Does this remind us of the principle that, once we bring our resources to Jesus, we must wait on His timing. Sometimes things happen immediately after we turn things over to him or they might not. Are you like me? I turn them over to him and then take them back because there isn’t enough action quick enough for me. It is something we have to learn that might be solved by him the way we expect or they might not, that is up to him. And when it seems as if he is delaying who is to say that it is not because it was in his plan to accomplish several other things first, things that were put on hold until we finally turned our resources over to him.

What a tremendous test, to wait on Jesus after we have brought our problems to him. But as Psalm 37:5 promises, “Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in him and he shall

bring it to pass". May God help us to learn to do both: to commit our way to him and also to trust in him when we do so?

Prayer

Your Grace and providence are sufficient for our needs, O God. May we learn to trust in the abundance of your good gifts. Free us to share that abundance with others Amen