

“Give”
Matthew 14:13-21
Pollocksville Presbyterian Church
Sermon #64
9th Sunday After Pentecost
20th Sunday in the COVID-19 Pandemic
8.2.20

Matthew 14:13-21 CEB

13 When Jesus heard about John, he withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself. When the crowds learned this, they followed him on foot from the cities. **14** When Jesus arrived and saw a large crowd, he had compassion for them and healed those who were sick. **15** That evening his disciples came and said to him, “This is an isolated place and it’s getting late. Send the crowds away so they can go into the villages and buy food for themselves.”

16 But Jesus said to them, “There’s no need to send them away. You give them something to eat.”

17 They replied, “We have nothing here except five loaves of bread and two fish.”

18 He said, “Bring them here to me.” **19** He ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves of bread and the two fish, looked up to heaven, blessed them and broke the loaves apart and gave them to his disciples. Then the disciples gave them to the crowds. **20** Everyone ate until they were full, and they filled twelve baskets with the leftovers. **21** About five thousand men plus women and children had eaten.

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

About 5,000 men plus women and children were fed. Think about that for a moment. 5,000 men plus women and children. That could be an average of three additional people per man to give us a grand total of 20,000. That's a lot of people! Understandably so, the disciples were nervous. I would be, too! Unfortunately, it's human nature to fret over the obstacles and fail to acknowledge the opportunity for ministry.

This story follows a low point for Jesus. In the dozen verses prior to today's scripture, King Herod threw a feast. At that feast, Herodias' daughter did a dance for Herod that got him all hot and bothered, he would do anything for the attractive woman, including having John the Baptist beheaded. I'm sure we can all have some sort of empathy for Jesus who is grieving his cousin and tries to be alone for a while.

But, the crowds can't leave our Savior alone. Why? Why won't Jesus simply command the crowd to go away? He needs to mourn.

Today's scripture is one of those stories I heard over and over growing up and I'm sure many of you did, too. Did you know it's a story that appears in each Gospel? That should tell you its importance. In Matthew's Gospel, the author emphasizes some things differently than the other Gospels. Even though Jesus wants to be alone, his compassion to minister to the sick supersedes his alone time. While Jesus could have refused to give, he gave. He continued to heal the sick. And that crowd grew and grew. As they journeyed from the cities to an isolated place, he continued to heal. And then it started getting late and there wasn't anything to feed the people. Or so the disciples thought.

“There’s nothing to feed these hungry people!!!!!! LORD, you need to send these folks away! Get them out of here so we don’t have a riot! They need to feed themselves, we can’t do it!!!!”

Now, as I was reading this scripture, I imagined this same conversation is happening in congregations across our country right now in light of global events. “We can’t do anything except pay the bills. Nope! We can’t do anything extra until this crisis passes over. Don’t even think about doing anything until we know how much money we’ve got coming in.” Of course, these were conversations happening already in many ministry settings, but COVID-19 has made it worse. However, the crowds of people who are in need around our communities still need some sort of healing and feeding.

Like the disciples, we are tempted to see the challenges as obstacles instead of opportunities. We say “can’t” instead of “can”. We shut down and hoard instead of giving what we can. Giving of our resources: Money, time, talent, five loaves of bread, and two fishes.

Our resources may not seem like they were last year or two decades ago, but these are the resources we have here and now. We may feel tempted to hoard. Or maybe we feel ashamed that what we have amounts to a meager 5 loaves and 2 fishes. How on earth are we to do ministry with that?!?!?! But, what does our LORD tell us? “Bring them here to me.”

“Bring them here to me.” These words, spoken by Jesus, humble us. They put us in our place. They disarm. Those words call out the spirit of scarcity that lulls us into hoarding. But, Jesus breathes into us the spirit of abundance with those five words: “Bring them here to me.” And through the Holy Spirit’s leading, we give what seems to be so insignificant and God uses those 5 loaves and 2 fishes to feed the masses.

Jesus could’ve easily rejected the crowd. But, in his compassion, he gave. Jesus could’ve dismissed the five loaves and two fishes, but he commanded the disciples to give. Give of what they had. And Jesus looked up into heaven and blessed this offering. Then, he gave the food to the disciples who gave it to the crowd and they ate until their bellies were full. All 20,000 or so of them.

I don't buy into the spirit of scarcity. All it does is strike fear into our hearts and then we drink the Kool-Aid of "not enough". Now, let me be clear, there is a fine line of hoarding and foolishly spending. I get it. We have to be wise in how we give and spend and how we save. But, scarcity is heresy. We worship an abundant God who creates and recreates every day. God is always doing something new. God, in the person of our Savior Jesus Christ, looks at us, looks at what we think is insignificant and says "bring them here to me" and he blesses us and our offering.

Talking about this story in Matthew, I'm drawn to the months ahead, especially October as we will move into Stewardship Season and celebrate 152 years as a congregation. Pollocksville Presbyterian has seen its share of events in those 152 years. By God's good

and gracious hands, we're still here. We're still standing. And right now in the current circumstances as we navigate PPC's upcoming birthday and a Stewardship Season present some challenges. It won't be easy.

Like Jesus, we are grieving. We are grieving the life we had before the pandemic and we are still trying to figure out what's next. Like the disciples, many of us may be tempted to fall into the trap of scarcity saying "it is not enough". Our resources of money, time, and talent may look different than last year. Yet, our LORD looks through our eyes and into our souls: Bring them here. Bring him the resources we have even if it seems like a meager five loaves of bread and two fishes to feed the masses. Give what we have and he'll work with it. Freely give of your resources of money, time, and

talent because he gave of himself freely. Freely give of the resources God has freely given you.

That's the spirit of abundance. That's the kind of God we serve: An abundant God who loves us so much and continues to work in and through us every day.

Beloved in Christ, be encouraged by this Good News!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.