

Good Morning, and Welcome to our Community Bible Study for Sunday, August 2 2020.

Matthew 14: 13-21

As we've followed Jesus over the past few weeks, we have reflected on the parables. Jesus' pattern in the Gospel of Matthew is to teach and preach, to travel and heal, and then teach again. In a sense, today's story, the feeding of the 5000, is an enacted, extended parable that teaches Jesus' disciples something about themselves, about the abundance of God, and life in the Kingdom of God. For the first century church, and indeed for us, it also speaks of that special meal of abundance, the Holy Eucharist, in which we taste the goodness and provision of the Lord, as well as glimpse a bit of what the heavenly banquet will be like in the Kingdom of Heaven.

In the Gospel narrative, Jesus has just learned of the death of his friend John the Baptist, at the hands of King Herod. I would imagine he wanted and needed some time away to grieve, to reflect, to pray. The Scripture indeed said that he went in a boat by himself and withdrew for a while to pray. Presumably the disciples would meet him later. However, wherever Jesus went, people were drawn to him, and soon crowds were following him. He had compassion on them, and healed them of their illnesses and infirmities. The disciples were worried because it was now late, and the location was remote, and they wondered how they would feed all these hungry people. Their solution was to send them back into the towns and villages to find food. They proposed this to Jesus, and they were surprised when he said that there was no need to do that, that they could give them something to eat. All the disciples could do was focus on how little they had, a few fish and loaves and bread. They were becoming upset. Jesus then just asked them to bring the food to him, and he asked the crowds to sit down in the grass. He looked up to heaven and blessed the food, broke the bread, and gave it to the disciples to distribute. And from those loaves and fish, all "ate and were filled" and there was food overflowing, running over, with 12 baskets left over. By the grace of God what was scarce and lacking became overflowing and abundant.

For the Jewish Christians that were the audience of the Gospel writer, this story would have reminded them of how Moses fed the people of Israel with manna in the desert. It would have also brought to mind how the prophet Elijah fed himself, a widow, and her son with a handful of meal until a famine ended. It would have also reminded them of the shared holy meal of the Eucharist, in which bread is broken and shared as a sign of new life in the Risen Jesus, a foretaste of the heavenly banquet without end that would become a reality in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Today I invite all of us to reflect on what this story means to us, today, in the 21st century, in the midst of a divided world, in the midst of a pandemic. Now, more than ever, we are invited to generously break the bread of life with others, to invite them into our communities and share fellowship. Though we can't physically share the bread of the Eucharist now, we can receive it spiritually, and celebrate our oneness as the Body of Christ. And when Jesus asks his disciples to "give them something to eat", might he be asking us the same thing? Isn't Jesus asking us to

feed the hungry, to break the bread of life, to share the Good News in abundance and joy? God bless you all, and have a wonderful week!

Matthew 14: 13-21

Feeding the Five Thousand

13 Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. ¹⁵When 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.' ¹⁶Jesus said to them, 'They need not go away; you give them something to eat.' ¹⁷They replied, 'We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.' ¹⁸And he said, 'Bring them here to me.' ¹⁹Then 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. ²⁰And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. ²¹And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Questions for Reflection and discussion

1. Why do you suppose it was important for Jesus to get away to a quiet place by himself on a regular basis? Why is withdrawing in the quiet also so important for us, his followers?
2. Can you relate to the disciples, who are worried about the practicalities of how they will feed all these people? Can you think of a time in your own life where worry has prevented you from seeing the wonderful possibilities that God has in store?
3. Why do you think Jesus asked the disciples to give the people something to eat? Might he be empowering them to live into their ministry as his followers? Might he be encouraging them to build community with the people so that they offer hospitality to each other? Or is it something else. What do you think?
4. What reminders of Eucharist do you see in this story?
5. What does this story say to us about the abundance of God?

6. If you had to sum up the meaning of this parable in a sentence or two, what would you say?
7. How does Jesus fill our deepest hunger?