

Devotions – August 2-8, 2020
By Judy Quirk
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Sunday, August 2, 2020

Feeding 5000

Text: Matthew 14:13-21

¹³ When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

¹⁵ As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.”

¹⁶ Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

¹⁷ “We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered.

¹⁸ “Bring them here to me,” he said. ¹⁹ And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people.

²⁰ They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹ The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

When I agreed to contribute this week’s devotions, I didn’t know that the Gospel reading was this one that I have loved since I was a child. At first, I felt just the wonder of feeding that many people with so little food and having twelve baskets of scrap at the end. I watched my mother and her sisters prepare food for family picnics, Thanksgiving and Christmas feasts and knew some of the preparation necessary. But here was Jesus praying and wonder of wonder there was plenty for all.

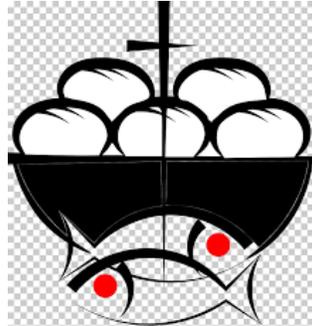
At some point, I recognized that there were two groups of persons who didn’t even matter enough to be included. Since I fit under both labels, I chafed at women and children being so insignificant that they weren’t even counted.

I don’t remember when I realized that this took place right after the death of John the Baptist, Jesus’ cousin. Jesus had left the crowds to be alone and grieve.

So now what do I see as the important message of this passage? Not that Jesus fed 5000 with only 5 loaves and 2 fish. Not that there were 12 baskets of leftovers. Not that a crowd of 5000 men plus women and children sat down when asked or that the disciples actually followed directions and distributed what they knew was a small amount of food. No, I see that Jesus even in his grief tended to our needs - had compassion and healed the sick, kept all with him, fed everyone. He said he is always with us. This is an example of that promise.

Let us pray:

Oh God, help us recognize that you are always with us in times of joy and times of sorrow. Let this knowledge sustain our hearts so we share this with all people by feeding the hungry, accompanying the grieving, remembering the forgotten. Give us your spirit so we may reflect your love. Amen and Amen.



Monday, August 3, 2020

Feeding 4000

Text: Matthew 15:32-39

³² Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.”

³³ His disciples answered, “Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?”

³⁴ “How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked.

“Seven,” they replied, “and a few small fish.”

³⁵ He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. ³⁶ Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people. ³⁷ They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ³⁸ The number of those who ate was four thousand men, besides women and children. ³⁹ After Jesus had sent the crowd away, he got into the boat and went to the vicinity of Magadan.

Once again this is a story of how much concern Jesus has for this crowd. They have been following him for three days while he healed sick and lame, opened eyes and ears. They have ended up in the desert. He has compassion and would not send them away hungry. There are different amounts of supplies and leftovers in this passage but the same actions. Disciples doubt but follow directions and the work gets done. The statement that he would not send them away hungry is for me the key to many ideas. Is the crowd hungry for food? for healing? for hope? for justice? Jesus prays, they eat and are satisfied. I’m not sure what to say about being satisfied. I see that the crowd could be well fed or pleased to have been with Jesus. Maybe they are happy that many persons were healed. Maybe glad just to be with others and were able to be together.

Also in this passage, much is done with prayer, some disciples, and few supplies. That encourages me. I look at this time when we are isolated in quarantine or seeking for justice for black and brown lives and I take heart. People of many ages and great ethnic diversity are

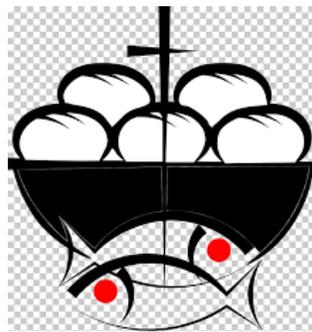
looking for change. Many have protested and marched for many more than three days and we see no end.

Do you have doubts? Sure. This time fulfills the curse, “May you live in interesting times.” Jesus’ disciples were hesitant - where can we get enough in this desert - Jesus said figure out what you have and start with that. They did. As a result, people were fed and satisfied.

So how can we help change to happen? Start with the first thing - pray for guidance. Next try to figure out what you have. Don’t stop there. Do something. Write a letter, make some calls, let friends and family know they are not alone. Support ELCA World Hunger or Feeding America with a donation of money or time. Let officials know how you feel about issues, and, by the way, vote.

Let’s pray:

We don’t understand how so little can feed so many. We don’t know what it means to be satisfied. We don’t know what we have. Help us. When we don’t even know what to ask for hear our litany, “Lord have mercy,” “Christ have mercy,” “Lord have mercy.” Amen.



Tuesday, August 4, 2020

Feeding 5000

Text: Mark 6:30-44

³⁰ *The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.*

³¹ *Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”*

³² *So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ³³ But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.*

³⁴ *When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.*

³⁵ *By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. “This is a remote place,” they said, “and it’s already very late. ³⁶ Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”*

³⁷ *But he answered, “You give them something to eat.”*

They said to him, “That would take more than half a year’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?”

³⁸ *“How many loaves do you have?” he asked. “Go and see.”*

When they found out, they said, “Five—and two fish.”

³⁹ Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. ⁴¹ Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² They all ate and were satisfied, ⁴³ and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. ⁴⁴ The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

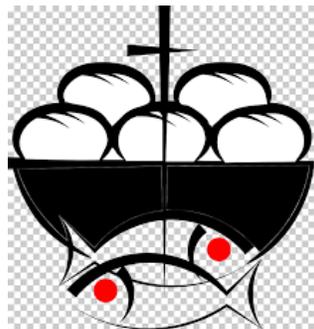
There are several things in this version of the story that I like. First, the apostles told Jesus all they had done and taught. That means that they were actively spreading the message of Jesus. I don't think they yet know that he is the Savior of the world or God's Son, but they are telling what they have seen and heard: lame walk, blind see - something wonderful is happening. Second, Jesus knew that they needed time to rest and relax. If we do not take the time to consider our moves, we can end up far from home without direction.

In this version the respite didn't happen. Jesus and the gang were met at the shore. This time after much healing and teaching, the disciples requested that Jesus send the crowds away. When Jesus said they should feed them, I think, they were like many church councils and asked where can we find enough money to do this? How much would it cost? If you have ever hosted a large meal you know the costs are great. Catering a lunch/supper for 5000 would break my bank. Fiscal responsibility is important and Jesus didn't say just go and get what you need. No, he asked what do you have? They took inventory and then proceeded.

One thing that I see as a miracle is not that the crowd was fed but that they all sat down. They sat in groups of 50 to 100 and waited to see what was next. In this time of protests and pandemic many are waiting to see what is next.

Let us pray:

Help us to find the pattern of this story, tell of Jesus' works, reflect on our actions, be patient to see what comes next. As we do these things may we also pray, feed the crowd, examine what we have. Thank you for your presence in our lives and bless us with peace. Amen.



Wednesday, August 5, 2020

Feeding 4000

Text: Mark 8:1-10

⁸ During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, ² "I have compassion for these people; they have already been

with me three days and have nothing to eat. ³ If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.”

⁴ His disciples answered, “But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?”

⁵ “How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked.

“Seven,” they replied.

⁶ He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people, and they did so. ⁷ They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. ⁸ The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ⁹ About four thousand were present. After he had sent them away, ¹⁰ he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

This is a fourth variation of story of Jesus feeding multitudes. There are little differences between the stories. Jesus is compassionate and concerned. The disciples wonder how they can possibly feed so many. So how can one feed these men with bread here in the desert? But they continued to do what Jesus asked. There was need and they helped meet it.

Sometimes we need to examine our surroundings, see a problem and try to figure out a solution.

I keep coming back to the words “food”, “hungry”, “desert” and think of the places here and now where there still are hungry people in food deserts. Sometimes the store is poorly stocked, a ghetto market where the prices are high and quality low. Or the distance to the market and lack of transportation makes shopping very challenging. I know a woman, who after job loss and resulting under-employment, found herself supplementing her groceries at food banks. Even there the distribution was very uneven. Since she could stop at a bank in a more affluent township and was not limited to the items she could carry on the bus, her selections were quite good. Sometimes she was given fresh fruits and vegetables. At her local bank she was happy to get bread and peanut butter.

So what do we do? We could volunteer to transport people to food or take food to ones who are in need. I remember Ernie Rosten who drove clients of the women’s shelter to whatever appointments or places they needed to be. We could follow his example by checking with agencies, Salvation Army, Room at the Inn, or St. Vincent’s to see where the need is.

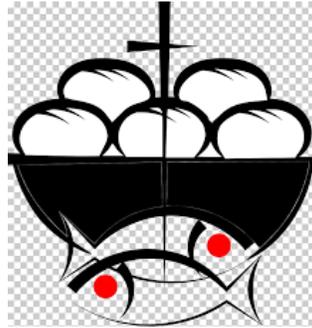
Or we could examine banking practices or governmental rules and employment and health care institutions and advocate for fair practices for all people.

In the scripture passage all were treated alike, they were fed and were satisfied. What can we do to assure the same for all the crowds today?

Let us pray:

You have blessed us with so much and often we forget to thank you for our abundance. Oh Creator, help us look beyond ourselves to see what needs might exist in our neighborhood or in

the world. Then lead us to work together on solutions. And thank you for all you have done for us. Amen



Thursday, August 6, 2020

Feeding 5000

Text: Luke 9:10-17

¹⁰ When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida, ¹¹ but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.

¹² Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, “Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here.”

¹³ He replied, “You give them something to eat.”

They answered, “We have only five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all this crowd.” ¹⁴ (About five thousand men were there.)

But he said to his disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” ¹⁵ The disciples did so, and everyone sat down. ¹⁶ Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people. ¹⁷ They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.

By now you have detected a pattern for my week’s prayers and devotions. Looking at the texts from different Gospels we find the stories are very similar. This story was of great importance to the early followers of Jesus. It reflects God’s great care of his people and care of the accumulated mob that was curious about his Son. All were welcome. Many were healed. They heard of the kingdom God. No one was sent away. I don’t know what the mix of people was, but I suspect that few were at the top of the Roman or Israel society.

All of the crowd sat without fighting or pushing to get to the best location. They were fed and twelve baskets of scraps were collected.

A commentator I read said that the crowd probably had some supplies with them and as they sat in groups of their own choice, they shared what they had. People shared so all ate, that was amazing. In a group of 5000 was there no one who kept what she/he had brought for herself? Did no one think the other person should have planned better? There are examples like the ten

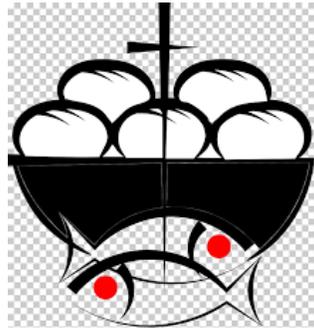
bridesmaids with five wise and five foolish in the Bible telling us to plan ahead. Here there were no judgements. Here all were welcome and fed.

This welcome reminds me of the song *There's a Wideness in God's Mercy*:

There's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in his justice which is more than liberty.
There is no place where earth's sorrows are more keenly felt than heav'n.
There is no place where earth's failings have such kindly judgement giv'n.
(ELW #587)

Let us pray:

Dear Savior, bless us as you blessed the bread beside the sea. Help us to see others as welcome members of the crowd and ourselves also as members of the multitude looking for Jesus. Help us to share what we have. May we recognize that your mercy, kindness, justice, and care extend beyond our selves, congregation or synod to the entire world. Amen.



Friday, August 7, 2020

Feeding 5000

Text: John 6:1-13

¹ Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), ² and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. ³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. ⁴ The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

⁷ Philip answered him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, ⁹ "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

Most of what I recall of the story is in this passage. But I also realize that my mental version is a combination of all six. I like that healing and teaching happen before the crowd is fed. The questions and doubts of the disciples make them more human to me. They are each not figures in paintings with a halo around their head. In this one I see another actor.

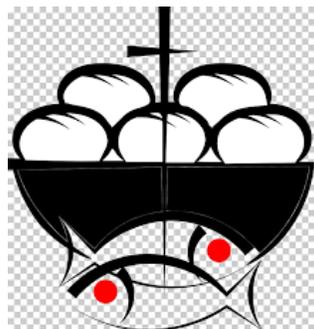
There is a new figure in this story, a boy. How did Andrew know that the boy had some food with him? What did the boy think as he and it was presented to the great teacher he was following? I don't know. I am strengthened by the fact that one who didn't count was the one to contribute to the solution. I need to remember to listen to voices that come from unexpected places or surprising people.

I also want to consider the scene earlier in the day when a boy ran all excited to his mother and proclaimed that he was going to go with the mob that was running to where "That Man" was going. Everyone could see the boat he got into and they could get to him by running around the shore. Once the boy's mother realized that no matter what she said he would go, she prepared a meal for him. She did not go with him to hold his hand but gave him the freedom to venture out after a person/adventure/quest. Taking steps into the unknown is hard for the one who goes but is also hard for the ones who stay behind.

This is the last of the "feeding thousands" I want to examine the week. But there is another item that comes up time and time again - plenty of grass. The people sat down on the ground on plenty of grass. God not only fed them and had compassion on them, he made sure they were comfortable. In a land where there is desert and rock and scree covered mountainsides, they sat in plenty of grass, comfort.

Let us pray:

Dear Comforter, Son of God, and Father, help us listen to those who we might dismiss as unworthy. Help us recognize persons who work behind the scenes. Help those who dash off in search of you find direction. Help us know you are always with us. Help us see your comfort in our lives. Bless us with health and safety. Amen



Saturday, August 8, 2020

Another Meal

Texts: Matthew 26: 26-29 (also Mark 14: 22-25 or Luke 22: 19-30)

²⁶ *While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."*

27 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

Here is another meal provided by Jesus. There are not 5000 present in that upper room, but thousands even millions have shared it. So he continues to feed us. Through the Lord’s Supper we are comforted and consoled. In this way we have a visible reminder that he is with us always. In this passage the blood of the covenant is poured out for many. I have heard given for “you” not given for “many.” I wonder how many times I have limited my view of the mercy and forgiveness of God.

Did you notice the refrain in all the passages? The way each meal happens? First the food is obtained, then blessed, then broken, then given to all. He took the loaves and looked to heaven. He blessed it. He broke it. He gave it to them.

He blessed it.

I remember when I was in Africa, we gave thanks before drinking a soda or bottle of water. At the end of meals, we again returned thanks to God and to the hands that had prepared or grew the food.

Remember the Norman Rockwell picture of the family praying in the restaurant and all the shocked people around them? I think we have fallen into the group of shocked people and often forget to give thanks.

So I’m asking for change. Pray! Give thanks!

As a child my meals started with rote prayers:

“God is great. God is good and we thank him for our food. Amen”

“Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest, and let this food to us be blessed. Amen”

At church meals we often start with “Praise God from whom.....” or “Be present....”

These are valid prayers and help us practice prayer to become comfortable and regular/mindful of prayers.

I try to use a series of sentences thanking for things nearby, for things in the neighborhood, things in this country, and things in the world. I find this format also works when I have a bunch of cares and worries but then I usually start with the larger circle of the world and finally end with me and those close to me.

Some have asked, “How can you pray out loud in a group?” and I find that my answer is practice. At first, I found it difficult to say prayers aloud even when I was alone but especially in a group. What if I looked or sounded silly or made mistakes? Ah well. God knows what we need. Sometimes it’s good to hear the words so we can clarify what we think we need or are

thankful for. I also find the “Amen” is a good way to end things - amen and amen, may it truly be so. Here I am at the end of my week of devotion writing and I am praying that that my words are a blessing and comfort to you.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, thank you. You welcome all. We are among those included in that crowd. You gave your body and blood for forgiveness of our sins and the sins of many. Thank you for this salvation. Help us now to share this gift with everyone. Help us remember to seek peace and justice. Help us to thank you for all things. Amen.

