

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Year A: 9th Weekend after Pentecost: Matthew 14:13-21

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Matthew 14:13-21

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. ¹⁴ When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. ¹⁵ When 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." ¹⁶ Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." ¹⁷ They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." ¹⁸ And he said, "Bring them here to me." ¹⁹ Then 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. ²⁰ And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. ²¹ And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Five loaves of bread and two fish. It doesn't sound like a very important meal. It's a simple meal really. That is until Jesus gets a hold of it.

We hear today the story of the feeding of the five thousand. A story so important to the early church, those first Christians, it can be found in every one of the four gospels in the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

This story and this miracle tell us what is at the core of who Jesus is and what it means to follow him. Not to mention, it's just a great story. No wonder it has been passed down by Christians over so many years.

Miracles make for a great story. Jesus turning water into wine, Jesus walking on water, Jesus raising the dead back to life.

And in the miracle we hear about today there is something absolutely wonderful and amazing and unforgettable about Jesus taking a few pieces of bread and fish and turning it into dinner for thousands of people, plus leftovers.

Now the dictionary defines a miracle as an event that appears to be contrary to the laws of nature and is regarded as an act of God or an event or action that is totally amazing, extraordinary, or unexpected.

But we know that a miracle is more than an amazing event. A miracle also reveals something about who God is. And when we consider this miracle in the context of the whole story today we actually see Jesus perform many miracles.

Let's start by remembering what's going on in Jesus' life at this point in Matthew's gospel today. We know that Jesus has just received terrible news. He has been told that John the Baptist is dead. That's where this story begins. Jesus has lost a friend and cousin, a prophet, the one who baptized him...and now he is grieving that loss.

The gospel writer tells us that, "when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself." And yet, even though he wanted to be alone, the people followed him.

When faced with this great crowd of people Jesus had compassion for them. It was a huge group of people that included the sick and the suffering, people who came to see Jesus, to be healed, to listen to him. Jesus had compassion for them and so he stayed with them and healed them.

Compassion. It's more than just seeing another person's pain. It means feeling sympathy for the suffering of others that includes a desire to help.

This past week I imagine that you have seen and heard and known suffering in one form or another. There are people suffering from COVID all around the world. So many people are unemployed. Many of us are afraid and anxious about the future. Or like Jesus, you might be grieving the loss of a loved one or worried about an illness or injury or a concern of another kind.

And yet in every place where there is suffering we also hear extraordinary stories of people who have compassion, helping those in need, sometimes risking their own life to do so. The health care worker who goes to work every day during this pandemic. The neighbor who brings food to someone who needs a meal. The foster mother who cares for a child. The child who makes someone smile and laugh.

Today in our gospel reading we focus on the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, but first we should take a moment to notice the miracles that take place for so many because of Jesus' compassion.

Consider the people in this crowd, the children and adults, as we hear this gospel lesson today. A crowd of people who followed Jesus on foot in need of healing, in need of love, in need of compassion.

Jesus healed them, even when he was hurting and tired. He gave them what he had and for those people on that day those healings were a miracle.

After Jesus spent the day healing, evening came and everyone was getting hungry. The crowd was hungry. The disciples were hungry. No doubt Jesus was hungry as well. So the disciples looked around did some simple math and came up with a solution. They said to Jesus, “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.”

But just when the disciples’ thought they had it all figured out, Jesus tells them, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.”

Imagine the look on the disciples’ faces. I suspect that they were at first speechless, a look of complete and total astonishment on their faces. And then the protesting began, the excuses, the disbelief.

“We have nothing here ... ” they said. Look Jesus, the situation is impossible. 5,000 hungry men, plus women and children. There is no way we can feed them. It’s a lost cause. Nothing we do will be enough.

We can look at situations around the world today, or even in our own community, and say the same thing. People dying from coronaviavirus and disease, wars that seem to have no end, children and adults who don’t have enough to eat, natural disasters that destroy entire communities. How often do we too shake our heads and say, “We have nothing here...” the need is too great for us to ever make a difference.

Well those overwhelmed disciples’ said to Jesus, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” Ah, so they did have something after all. But not enough to really address the problem, or so they thought.

And Jesus said, “Bring them here to me.” Bring what you have to share, Jesus says, and I will bless it and show you that it is enough and more.

And so with five loaves and two fish Jesus fed over five thousand people that evening. And when they collected what was leftover, after everyone had been filled, they gathered twelve baskets of food.

It was a miracle. The hungry fed with the simple offering of one meal. Amazing!

So what do these miracles teach us today about Jesus? Jesus has the power to heal and satisfy, yes. But why did Jesus heal and provide food? Jesus had compassion for the crowd, and in that crowd he saw each person, each individual, and what they needed.

When Jesus looked out into that crowd no one was invisible to him. The sick, the poor, the hungry, the curious, the young, the old...Jesus saw each and every one.

That is the heart of this miracle. No one is invisible to our God, no one is unworthy or unimportant or unlovable. God has compassion and love for all. Feeding five thousand plus people with a few loaves of bread is impressive but the compassion and love that that meal came from is the real miracle.

And just as Jesus saw the crowd that day when the loaves and fish were multiplied, so God sees the needs of the people in our world today, suffers with us and has compassion for us.

Yet another miracle is that God is able to open our eyes to see people in this community and around the world.

The beauty of this story today is that it continues. God sees and loves those who are hungry, hurt, grieving, rejected, and forgotten. And God invites you and me to be God's feet and hands and heart to care for one another and all those in need.

Our God is able to do amazing, miraculous things with the gifts we bring, little or great. Today our God challenges us to share what we have, even when we don't think it is enough, even when we know it isn't enough.

Miracles happen everyday. They begin when we follow Jesus, open our hearts to his compassion and love, and then offer whatever we have to God who multiplies the smallest gift to something amazing, extraordinary and totally unexpected.

So please watch for a miracle this week. And know that God just might work through you so that you will be the miracle someone else needs. Amen.