

Lectionary A August 3, 2014
8th Sunday After Pentecost
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, IN

Isaiah 55:1-5
Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21
Romans 9:1-5
Matthew 14:13-21

Ho! You Give Them Something to Eat

Ho! That's the way the Isaiah text for today begins. In my study Bible it says that "Ho" is a greeting used during the time this text was written to get the attention of the dead at a funeral.

Ho! Wake up you lifeless people. Wake up and get the message. Quit operating out of the mode of scarcity. Quit acting like there's not enough for everyone. Quit hoarding stuff that is really worthless when it comes to what is really important. Ho! Look to me. I will give you an abundance of the best food you could ever imagine. And it is free!!! Eat what I give you and you will be alive!

This Isaiah text is the prelude to our Gospel story. I can almost hear Jesus when the disciples come to him, asking him to tell the crowd who had followed him to this "God forsaken place" where there was nothing but the ground they were sitting on, to go home and feed themselves.

"Ho!!! You give them something to eat."

Let's back up a little and set the stage for this scene. It is important to know what kind of mood Jesus was in. In the verses just before this story, we read that John the Baptist's head had just been served on a platter at Herod's birthday party. Our text begins, "*Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself.*" Jesus was grieving. His cousin had been brutally killed to satisfy the whims Herod's angry wife.

Jesus got on a boat and sailed away to be by himself. But—*when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns.*"

Jesus came ashore and instead of the solitude he wanted he was greeted by a horde of desperate people. Now, we learn later in the story that there were 5000 men. That's how crowds were counted back then. They counted families. 5000 families, that means, when Jesus got off the boat he could have been bombarded by as many as 20,000 or more.

What was Jesus' reaction? "*When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.*"

Jesus' heart overflowed with love for these people. He reached out in love and set about curing their ills. While he was busy tending to this crowd of followers, his disciples interrupt. "Excuse us, Lord, but we've been here a long time and these people are getting hungry. There's no place to buy food here, so why don't you send them home now so they can feed themselves."

Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." Did you hear "Ho!" in Jesus' tone of voice?

At that moment the disciples were kind of "dead" to what Jesus was up to here. *"They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish."*

They probably expected Jesus to reply, "Oh, in that case, get these people out of here." But that's not what he said. Instead, *he said, "Bring them here to me." 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. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full."*

Can you imagine what that was like for the disciples? Jesus took those 2 fish and 5 buns, which was the equivalent of 2 ½ McFish sandwiches. Jesus looked up to heaven, blessed the food and broke it. Then he handed it to the disciples and told them to pass it out to the crowd. "Ho!! You give them something to eat."

Yesterday, I attended the ordination of Pastor Tim Fleace in Loogootee. Bishop Gafjken gave the sermon on this story. He said, "Here they were with their little baskets on their hips, passing out the broken bits of food. They obediently passed out the bits Jesus gave them. And when they looked down at their baskets, they were still full!

This miracle happened, not when Jesus blessed the food, but it happened in the giving. When the disciples gave it away it multiplied and fed the crowd until they were satisfied and then some. There were twelve baskets of leftovers.

This story is so important that it is all four Gospels. In fact, Mark has two accounts of Jesus feeding the multitudes. Why is it so important? What does it say to us here today at Grace and Peace?

First of all, feeding the hungry is important. *"Ho! You give them something to eat."*

And, just like the Isaiah text says, it is important to look at the abundance God gives, instead of grabbing hold of our scarcity. *"Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."*

This is a call to bring Jesus what we have. Give it to Jesus. Jesus will bless what we offer to him. Jesus will take our little morsels and break them. Then Jesus will give them back to us and

send us out to use them to minister to the multitudes of hungry people. The miracle happens and the results will be bigger than we could ever imagine.

Here in worship every Sunday, we come to Jesus in this place of solitude and safety. Here at the Lord's table, this is a deserted quiet spot where we come to be fed, we bring with us the crumbs we have to offer after a hard stressful week. Jesus takes our crumbs, blesses them and breaks them. He breaks our selfishness, our fearful hoarding of our scarce commodities—he breaks our pride and self sufficiency.

Then he gives us back our morsels and sends us out to use them to feed his people. They will be satisfied and then some. Our baskets will overflow.

Bishop Gafjken pointed out that living with the idea that there isn't enough to go around does crazy things to people. When they think there isn't enough food, or money, or water, or health, or whatever...that's when people start hoarding and grabbing on to the little they think they have until they squeeze the life out of it and it is worthless. That's what causes wars and violence.

Ho! Be like Jesus. Have compassion. Stop thinking about how little there is, and give what you have to God. Then stand back, cause a miracle is going to happen. It is in giving what we have without worrying about how little we think we have, that Jesus uses it to make something wonderful happen.

This morning as you write your prayer request, think about your gifts, your morsels. Write them down and give them to God. Offer to God what you think is not enough. When you come to the table, this deserted place of safety where your morsels are broken by Jesus as his body is broken, through his body and blood your morsels become food so rich and nourishing it will feed multitudes.

Ho! This is the food that will make you alive! You take your pieces of broken gifts, blessed by Jesus, and go be an overflowing miracle to God's hungry children. Amen.