

Lectionary A August 2, 2020 9th Sunday after Pentecost
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, Indiana
Pastor Roberta Meyer

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

More Than Enough

Our Gospel from Matthew begins *“Now when Jesus heard this, “* What is the “this” that Jesus heard? If we go to the beginning of Matthew 14 we find out that John the Baptist, Jesus’ cousin, had been killed by Herod. Not just killed but beheaded. So, now when Jesus heard this, *“he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself.”* I can identify with this, especially this week. A place to be alone with my grief where I can feel all the emotions that come to me, sadness, grief, anger, confusion, and powerlessness. Jesus and I can sit with these feelings. We can cry together and pray together. I can rest in Jesus arms.

Jesus had taken a boat and it seems the crowd got wind that Jesus was in that boat and they followed him by foot. I think always before I read this story in a way that sounded like Jesus was interrupted, that he didn’t get the alone time he wanted or need. But I don’t think that was the case. Jesus was in a boat and it says he withdrew to a deserted place. The crowd couldn’t get to that deserted place because they were on land. Then Jesus came ashore. And the crowd was there waiting for him. Doesn’t sound like Jesus came ashore, when he was ready to leave the boat? Jesus showed us it is alright and even necessary to find alone time to grieve and to talk to God.

When Jesus came to shore, the crowd was there waiting for him. The scripture says, *“When Jesus came ashore, “he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them.”* He had compassion on them. The Greek word that is translated to “had compassion” in this passage is *esplagchnisthe*. It “refers to a gut-wrenching, intestinal-twisting, visceral emotion of care.” In the Gospels, when it comes to Jesus’ emotions, if it is worth feeling, it is worth feeling deeply. It is a *deep emotion* that moves Jesus or someone in his parables to saving action. This gut-wrenching compassion moves the Good Samaritan to stop and help the beaten man. It moves Jesus to heal one man and raise a woman’s dead son. It moves longing father to rush to his prodigal son with tears of joy. And here, the deep compassion that Jesus has for the humongous crowd moves him first to heal their sick, and then to feed them. Jesus showed us emotions are important. Deep stomach-churning compassion is what motivates Jesus to help God’s children.

And this compassion motivates Jesus to act. He sees the crowd and is called to heal the sick among them. Touching them, praying for them, comforting them, curing their diseases, taking away their pain, soothing their hurts. Jesus heals physical and emotional ailments. Today, my heart hurts from the events that have taken place this week. Thursday was Mary’s entry into

God's Kingdom, and her ultimate healing. Then Saturday morning Amy and her brother got a call from their dad. Their stepmother, after a long illness, joined Mary in heaven. And with this news, Amy went ahead and had her son, Josh's graduation party which had already been postponed once. We tried to make Josh's party a happy celebration, while carrying grief and sadness. I'm in the crowd, coming to be touched by Jesus.

Jesus did something else. Jesus fed the crowd. Jesus did this by taking the meager amounts of food the disciples had and multiplying them. These disciples came to Jesus telling him that they need to send the crowd on its way because everyone was getting hungry. Jesus responded in Jesus fashion. *"They need not go away; you give them something to eat."* Then the disciples responded in disciple fashion. "We don't have anything to give them. That is we don't have anything, except...except five loaves of bread and two fish." They were thinking scarcity. "That's not enough to feed the twelve of us, thirteen if we count you, Jesus. We don't have enough to even give each person in this multitude a crumb." The disciples felt they had next to nothing to offer.

Jesus asked them to bring him the measly meal. *"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."*

What! How could that be? I can imagine the thoughts going on inside the disciples' heads. Not only did everyone have all they wanted to eat, but there were twelve baskets of leftovers! You know during the crazy summer there have been several times I have felt I had next to nothing to work with. Everything is so strange, and I don't know what in the world I can do. Then comes this timely story.

A lot of people throughout the centuries have tried to explain away this miracle, saying that it was really more like a giant carrying in meal, but we aren't going there. Let's just accept it at face value. It's a miracle. A miracle where Jesus takes next to nothing and turns it into overflowing abundance.

There are so many powerful lessons in this Gospel story. We learn that first and foremost it is all right to retreat and be alone to take care of ourselves before facing the multitudes in our lives. Then we can get off the boat with something to give others.

We learn that it is more than all right to have deeply intestine twisting compassion for others. Showing emotion and caring so deeply we feel other's pain motivates us to take action.

And we learn that when we have next to nothing to give, That's okay. It's enough. This is the amazing Good News in this story. Next to nothing is Jesus' favorite thing to work with.

If you feel like you've got next to nothing left some days, have faith. What you have is enough. Because Jesus can turn next to nothing into more than enough. Amen