“If You Have Been Fed”

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Matthew 14:13-21

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***13Now*** ***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.***

Back in 1982, I met a woman while I was in college, who was *in love* with her 3 or 4 year old nephew Jacob. He’d come running to her, smash into her knees and say “Aunt Doolie!” Jacob is now partnered with a beautiful woman named Carly. If you look up “Miss Carly’s” on Facebook, you will find out about her, her background, and her charity organization that she and Jacob run out of their home. Miss Carly’s1 website says the following: “**What We Do.** Open our home to those in need in order to connect with people personally and build relationships. No forms. No alienation. We serve those who have fallen between the cracks and burned all of their bridges. We provide basic necessities and unconditional love with a side of sass.” Their Facebook site says, “Empowering those in need, one sack lunch at a time.” Their love for the neighbor in need is far reaching. Also on their website it says, “We provide meals at our door to anyone who is hungry, 24/7, **no questions asked**,” and “We provide free Narcan to anyone in need. This is NOT limited to people using drugs….ANYONE can save a life!” They are an amazing organization, as Miss Carly is an amazing woman. She is a woman who made it through the struggles of her own background, and is perhaps one of the reasons that the love and compassion she has for all those who come to their home is tremendous.

I’ve never met Miss Carly or Mr. Jacob. Miss Carly’s is not a religious organization. But I know that what they are doing is feeding the 5,000, starting with the same compassion that Jesus felt for the crowd.

This miracle is the only one of Jesus’ miracles that is in all four gospel accounts. Each version has slightly different details. In *Luke* 9, the disciples have just returned from their travels. They and Jesus “slipped quietly into a town called Bethsaida.” The crowds learned about it and came to him. In *Mark* 6 upon the disciples return, they and Jesus went away in a boat to a deserted place, but people saw where they went and travelled there by foot. In *John’s* gospel, the serious persecution of Jesus has already begun. Jesus and his disciples go up a mountain and the crowds follow him.

In Matthew, the text we read today, the disciples don’t enter the picture until after Jesus has cured the sick. Of all four accounts, this account from Matthew gives us the most private view of Jesus. For the last few chapters we have been reading about Jesus the teacher who has been telling parables to those around him. In what seems like a sudden change of scene then, the writer inserts the dramatic and gruesome account of how John the Baptist was killed by King Herod, after the King was tricked into killing him. Having been jarred by that drama, the reader can almost feel as stunned as Jesus. Up until now, John the Baptist, Jesus’ cousin remember, and Jesus had both been around at the same time. Our text today begins just after Jesus has been told about the death of his cousin. This is the most alone we have experienced Jesus. For just a moment, we have to read the first line: ...***when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself,*** and stop. We need to let that settle, let Jesus withdraw, catch our own breath. It’s hard to talk about the miracle without considering Jesus’ state of mind in this case.

To us, a miracle is a miracle, so we don’t really think about how or why or what barriers might have had to be overcome. We can place ourselves in the text somewhere if we make metaphors out of most of the scene. But this part – Jesus’ stunned after hearing about the death of his cousin – we don’t need a metaphor for that. Stunned by grief, needing to go off to a deserted place, catch our breath? Jesus’ cousin who was helping to spread Jesus’ message. Jesus’ cousin John the Baptist was killed because of what John said about the King. Was Jesus complicit in the death of John? Did Jesus wonder about changing his message, maybe not being so harsh, maybe playing things down a bit, for a while? Let’s just limit the miracles until things die down.

Maybe Jesus stayed in the boat by himself for a while, but when he came ashore and saw the crowds, he had compassion for them. From his own heartbreak, he could see their heartbreak.2 He had compassion for them and cured their sick. For some, the connection to Jesus begins in a moment of compassion like this. In the current social climate of our country and the world, I wonder if the miracle in this story isn’t the feeding, isn’t the curing the sick, but is the compassion that was shown. I know some in this room who are capable of curing the sick, and some here are able to feed many with little; but *all* of us are capable of compassion.

For the last three weeks our scripture texts have been the parables of Jesus. Last week we heard that the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, that begins as a tiny seed but grows into a giant shrub or a tree. It seems fitting then that after teaching about the kingdom of heaven, Jesus provides an example of that very thing. Five loaves and two fish(es) being enough to feed more than 5,000 people. Something small being exactly what everyone needs and is enough for everyone. “In the kingdom of heaven, there is compassion, people share their resources, and there is more than enough for everyone.”2

Last week and one other week we learned that the kingdom of heaven was like a fisherman’s net cast wide enough to catch all kinds of fish, the good and the bad. Or like the field with both wheat and weeds, unseparated until after the harvest. Then in today’s reading we see that kingdom of heaven in action also when we think of the crowd – Jesus cured their sick, without asking if they were good or bad, wheat or weed. He cured all their sick; he fed everybody. **No questions asked.**

Commentator Jennifer Kaalund writes, “The miracle of Jesus feeding more than five thousand men, women, and children is a widely studied miracle. Some scholars focus on the blessing of the loaves and bread and suggest that this miracle is perhaps the precursor of the communion meal. Others focus on the satiated crowd or the symbolism of the twelve full baskets. While all of these observations are notable, the simple detail that Jesus did not send the people away is also remarkable. Instead of commanding them to leave, he orders them to stay and sit down on the grass. He then gets to work doing what he has come to do.”2

My question for us today is, what have *we* come to do?

Having been recognized by Christ, perhaps healed by Christ, and fed by Christ, what kinds of things move us to compassionate action? Maybe those things that we already do. Maybe we need to change directions. We are all works in progress, and we are all loved by God. If we start there, we too can be part of someone’s miracle.

Let’s pray….

1Miss Carly’s; “Empowering those in need, one sack lunch at a time.” “**What We Do**

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2<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-18/commentary-on-matthew-1413-21-4>

3<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-18/commentary-on-matthew-1413-21-6>