

Show and Tell

Matthew 14:13-21; Isaiah 55

Think back to the last time you were hungry. And, for you who skipped breakfast today, it just might be now, right? Actually, what I don't mean is the kind of hungry you are when you skip breakfast or it's two in the afternoon and you have not had lunch yet. I mean the kind of hungry which is having not eaten for at least one day or more.

Now, for me, I felt really hungry the last time I had my annual physical and was on a mandatory food and liquids fast from 6:00PM to 1:00PM the next day. Some of you can relate to those medical tests where you can't eat a darn thing until that test is over, and I know some of you have also had the experience of being in the hospital with only ice shavings to eat for days.

But, to be honest, most of us, not all as I know there are some watching who can relate, but most of us have never had to go without food unless it's for a purpose,

usually a purpose of our own choosing.

We at St. John's have talked a lot about the disparity of those who have and those who have not. We have seen through the program "Weekend Kid's Meals" the children who go home on weekends without enough food to thrive. We have people who serve at Community Table once a month, a ministry that is very important not only for the church, but for this community of Eau Claire.

And, during this pandemic, we have seen the need and the disparity that has become even more of a wide chasm that many cannot climb out of. It's time for a miracle. In the midst of this disparity, the Gospel lesson truly has something to say: "You give them something to eat." Jesus tells us that the miracle he performs isn't just something he tells, he shows it, too.

Jesus says to his disciples, "You give them something to eat." What can this mean for us? Certainly,

Jesus knew that his disciples would not be able to accomplish such a task as this miracle does, so why say it? Let's look again at this marvelous miracle story...

First, I want to point out that Jesus is in mourning. He has just heard that his first cousin John, who was the Baptist, was violently executed and beheaded. So, Jesus, in his grief, goes off to meditate and pray, to be alone, but he is followed by a large crowd; a crowd that is desperate to hear him, be with him, and experience healing through him. In the midst of such need, it's easier to be overwhelmed and turn the other way, but Jesus sees them, and no doubt still with the grief he feels, has compassion upon them.

Then, comes probably the most profound miracle Jesus performs: He feeds not only through a miracle, through physical, tangible food, but he also feeds their spiritual hunger. There are so many themes of spiritual and physical hunger found in the scriptures. Just look at the amazing symbols that food

and hunger portray in the bible, which takes us deep into the human story.

In the song Mary sings when she finds she is pregnant with Jesus, she praises God as the one who "has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty." In the reading today from Isaiah, we hear of the rich compassion of God towards those who are hungry: **"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."**

And, in Exodus, we hear of God feeding the chosen people by sending glorious manna, manna from heaven that enables the people of God to worship the Lord who is God and who is One. Scripture is full of God feeding the lost ones, the hungry ones, the poor ones.

Now, here we have Jesus in his compassion feeding over 5,000 people, but here he is also teaching his disciples that this compassion will be their task in carrying the message

of Christ into a hungry world. When it comes time to eat, the disciples have the usual human response though. Seeing that people are hungry, they want to send them all away. Let them deal with their problem of hunger! They were the ones who came out here and bothered Jesus anyway! And, Jesus, no doubt, to begin his instruction of what discipleship is, said, "You give them something to eat."

Compassion...the Gospel says that Jesus had compassion upon them. No doubt, he is instructing his disciples to do the same. We are called to have the same compassion of Jesus. Compassion opens doors that have been slammed because of condemnation. Compassion helps the most cynical heart heal. Compassion brings wholeness to the broken and joy to the sorrowful.

When we encounter the hungry, those who are physically, emotionally, and spiritually hungry, we often wait for someone else to be compassionate so that we don't need to be bothered so much. But, like the disciples,

we too need to hear from our Lord today, "You give them something to eat." This is a show and tell moment of Jesus Christ. This is not a God who is all talk and no doing.

But, did you notice the response the disciples have to Jesus command to feed the people. They say, "but...but...we only have some bread and two fish!" You can almost hear it as an excuse rather than as a logical reason. I mean, come on, we just simply don't have the resources! Can't we just send them away? They all got healed, didn't they?" That's an interpretation, but you almost could hear that implicitly stated.

Instead, the response is, "You give them something to eat." You see, I think that the disciples were waiting on Jesus to be the compassionate one instead of having to be compassionate themselves. After all, they were used to Jesus responding to the healing of others while they were mostly bystanders to the healing.

But, when Jesus said quite matter of fact, “You give them something to eat,” he wasn’t saying it to promote his own miracle that he was about to do. He wasn’t trying to prove something that he was God and we are not. He was showing us and telling us how to be followers of the Way. He truly wanted his disciples to have the same compassion that he saw they didn’t have, for he knew that eventually, it would be up to them. Call it “on the job training” if you will. He was training his disciples and us on how to be compassionate in this world.

You know, it’s important for our children to learn about Christ, as they do in Sunday school, at confirmation and at worship. And, it’s important that they learn about the Bible, too, especially in a world now that is so illiterate about what the Bible says. But, it’s more important than all of those things that children learn about compassion, about God’s love, and about justice. If they don’t have those qualities, what does knowing a few bible stories do to help them? How could we ever expect our young ones to be

compassionate to those who are in need unless we teach them to be as Jesus is?

Somewhere in your experience this week, you will see a person or situation where compassion is needed. If you are open to the teaching of Jesus today, you will know that the Spirit is leading you be to compassionate. And when you begin to wonder what can be done for that situation or person, I pray that these words of Jesus will come to you: “You give them something to eat.”

As the mystic Saint Theresa of Avila once said, “Christ has no body now but yours. No **hands**, no **feet** on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the **feet** with which he walks to do good.”

I pray that this will be so for us. Amen.