

8.6.2023 Time after Pentecost, 10

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Isaiah 55:105; Psalm 145:8-0, 14-21; Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14:13-21

“Jesus said, ‘You give them something to eat’”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

In today’s gospel story, we’re given a glimpse of the church. We’re given a glimpse of the work that Jesus Christ calls us into as Christians. The God whom we cannot see is revealed in the compassion of Jesus who healed the sick and fed the hungry. The God who is always hidden in unknowing, we come to know in Jesus through our faith active in love. In Jesus we see God as God truly is. We see love, compassion, forgiveness, transformation – in Jesus, we experience God’s grace. As the Psalmist writes, “*The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord, and you give them their food in due season. You open wide your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing*” (Psalm 145:15-16).

In today’s gospel we also see very clearly Jesus’ humanity. Jesus shared our humanity. Like us, he suffered grief and needed time alone to pray. Jesus needed time in the compassionate presence of the Father. Upon hearing that his relative John had been murdered, Jesus, sensing sorrow and danger, withdrew by boat to a deserted place.

How many of us can understand this feeling of being overwhelmed by tragedy, perhaps the death of a family member or a close friend? How many of us have sought solitude in the compassion of God the Father in prayer? Yet the crowds, with their needs, followed Jesus on foot and were already there when he went ashore. The one who sought compassion in prayer, responded with compassion in action for those who came to him. Jesus didn’t brush them off, he didn’t tell his disciples to send the crowds away.

Jesus demonstrated a profound truth about himself, and his body the church: we are Christ’s body when we live for others, when we serve others with compassion. Jesus knew that the church would mean suffering and compassion for others. We are the church when we move from prayer to faith active in love. We, ourselves, are healed as we serve alongside Jesus. Jesus, dwelling in our humanity, reveals what our humanity is truly capable of.

We often lament the seeming absence of God in the midst the world’s evil and misery. Today’s gospel offers a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven revealed in Jesus. We glimpse what his body the church on earth is to look like through our hands – serving, feeding and healing with compassion. God is present in this world because Jesus is raised and alive, always seeking to work through his body, the church.

It was late in the day, and people lingered to be near Jesus. It was perhaps getting dark and people stayed to be near the light of the world. I imagine that the crowds included many different kinds of people of different ethnicities and backgrounds. So great a crowd must have been diverse. Yet Jesus did not discriminate; he did not test their orthodoxy or question their scripture knowledge; he did not ask their religion or denomination. Jesus had compassion for them for them and healed their sick.

If Jesus was worried about food, he didn't say anything. It was his disciples who broached the topic. Perhaps they were also hungry. Jesus immediately said to them, "*They need not go away; you give them something to eat.*" Jesus' words offer us a glimpse of how we, his church, are to act toward those in need.

"*You give them something to eat,*" is are words embodying Jesus' command to love one another. Never has there been a more direct and concrete command, as the embodiment of loving one another, than to share our food with those who are hungry. Hunger touches all people as a basic human need, and people hungered for Jesus. They followed him, to be close to him and know his grace.

We also glimpse ourselves standing alongside of Jesus' disciples. Jesus' words to the disciples are also words spoken to each of us, "*They need not go away; you give them something to eat.*" Yet the disciples' response was one of fear, sounding defeated when they said, "*We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.*" The disciples spoke as spectators looking on the crowd unable to act. We, too, fear that we will not have enough to act in ministry, to respond to the need we see around us.

Jesus said to them, "*Bring them here.*" Again, Jesus words are a command to bring to him what little we have so that he might transform what we offer into ministry to those in need. Jesus' words, "*Bring them here,*" are an invitation to believe in his real presence among us.

Jesus took the loaves and the fish, blessed them, and gave them back to the disciples, and all ate and were filled. This is what Christ does for us, what Christ does in our church and through our hands. Simple bread and wine are transformed; they become the means of grace to forgive, renew and heal us. Jesus blessed the food, so that the disciples could feed the hungry. Jesus always works through human hands.

This story reminds me that we live in a world with an abundance of food, and yet many in our community go hungry every day. The food wasted and discarded in our nation alone is

staggering. *Forbes* magazine estimates that 80 billion pounds of food is wasted every year in this country alone by consumers, restaurants, and grocery stores – and yet many go without food. Like the words of the prophet Isaiah, “*Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come!*” – Jesus words, “*You give them something to eat,*” ring out with real compassion.

The crowds continue to come to Jesus for life and healing. Each Sunday, we are fed with the free gift of grace, Christ’s body and blood, forgiving and renewing us. Every week people who have been fed and forgiven from this table, set tables in our fellowship hall to feed the hungry. Every week, people bring food into this church donating to Loaves and Fishes, and the miracle continues. Members of the Stephen Ministry visit the homebound offering Holy Communion and hope, and St. Mark’s Men’s Group has established an Emergency Food Pantry, so that we can respond to people who come to this church hungry during the week. Jesus continues the miracle through each of your hands.

The disciples underestimated Jesus. They didn’t think Jesus could feed the crowds. Do we also underestimate Jesus? If Jesus asks you to help him, he will also give you his strength. You are the hands of Jesus in this world, offering compassion and hope.

How is Jesus calling you to help feed, forgive, and act with compassion for others? You are the miracle of faith that feeds others. You are the miracle of compassion offering hope.

Jesus says, “*You give them something to eat.*” Jesus needs your hands in this world. Amen.