

Sermon
9 Pentecost—Proper 13-A-2
St. Andrew's
August 2, 2020
William Bradbury

Isaiah 55:1-5
Psalm 145: 8-9, 15-22
Romans 9:1-5
Matthew 14:13-21

Jesus withdraws in a boat to a deserted place by himself.

He has just received the news that his cousin, John the Baptizer, has been beheaded by King Herod Antipas.

Jesus is grieving over this loss and needs time and space to sit with his broken heart.

And surely his mind must be reeling too, since it is obvious that if state power can do such an unspeakable thing to John, what must the future hold for him. Jesus knows that his mission to inaugurate the Realm of God infuriates the political leaders. To proclaim and practice the universal love and justice of God is always seen as a threat by those build up themselves by putting down others.

In 1965 when John Lewis is crossing the Edmund Pettis Bridge on the March to Montgomery, he and the others are attacked by State Police because Governor George Wallace knows that the arrival of the Beloved Community is a threat to a way of life which is built upon its opposite: White Supremacy, segregation, and the right to keep Black Americans in their place, which is under the knee of white people.

Jesus and the disciples need time alone, but word spreads so when they get out of the boat, they see a needy crowd waiting. Unlike most of us in that situation, Jesus has compassion on them and heals the sick. Just because his movement has been attacked is no excuse to stop living the good news.

But then it gets late and the disciples urge Jesus to send the hungry crowd away, but Jesus says: **"They need not go away; you give them something."**

But they say, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish."

But Jesus replies, "Bring them here to me." And then he does what we recognize from the Service of Holy Eucharist, he takes, and blesses, and breaks the bread and gives it to the people.

So, the multitude is having a preview of the Last Supper and the post-resurrection Eucharistic feast.

We, however, during this pandemic are in the middle of a eucharistic fast. Not because we don't want to receive the Body and Blood of Christ, but because love for our neighbor **must always take precedence** over our personal desires.

It is shocking to see some churches around the country who think they are showing off their great faith by gathering together in ways that have made many sick and some dead.

This isn't an act of faith; it is an act of arrogance and disobedience to the command to love our neighbor.

We best remember James 4:6: "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

So, what does it mean to have faith?

Let's look at the disciples:

First, we see their humanity. "Lord, send these folks away to get something to eat, **"Why should we give up our lunch to these strangers! Surely the little we have won't do them any real good."**

This is the essence of following ego, over following Christ: **We don't want to give up the little we have, especially when it won't do any "real" good. This is how the world thinks, and how we were raised to think: life is a zero-sum struggle. The more others have the less I have. If I give up my lunch, I lose my lunch.**

This applies to any gift we may have:

- +If I give a pledge to the church, I won't have all I need.
- +If I join a non-violent protest against injustice, I'll ruin my day off.
- +If I vote, I'll have to take off from work.
- +If I take the time to treat those in the service industry with kindness and respect by wearing a mask and thanking them, I'll run late.

You recall that when Jesus returns to Nazareth, "he could do no mighty work there...and he was amazed at their lack of faith." Mark 6:6

Lack of faith, which we all experience, is only healed by giving to Christ the little bit we have and letting Christ take, bless, break, and give it to the world through us.

Refusing to give is not an option for those who follow Jesus. For example, as one pastor said, **"how we feed others is on our final exam."**

In the parable of the Last Judgment we hear: 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food.' And the king replied, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

I happened to pick up a book in my library I've had since college written by Episcopal priest and social activist Malcolm Boyd, titled Are you Running with me, Jesus? It's a book of conversational prayers. One starts this way:

"I'm scared, Jesus. You've asked me to do something I don't think I can do. I'm sure I wouldn't do it except that you asked me. But I don't feel strong enough, and you know that I lack the courage I'd need...."

Then the prayer ends this way: "I wish you'd just leave me alone today, but if this is what you think is best, I'll try. But I don't want to. Pray for me Jesus." Page 23

Faith is never faith in myself, but always faith in Christ.

Trusting that he will take our gift and use it for the healing of others, as well as provide for us. The disciples **give away 5 loaves, but end up with 12 baskets of bread.**

I remember a young man named Vonzell, member of an AIDS support group I was running. As he lay dying Vonzell—down to about 70 pounds--said with a smile on his face, **"Bill, you can't out give God."**

We are in a year of grief. We grieve the loss of life and freedom brought by the pandemic.

We grieve the loss of our illusions:

+the illusion that in 2020 people are judged by the content of their character and not the color of their skin;

+the illusion that our national leaders are competent and more concerned with healing the nation, than maintaining their status and power.

We want Jesus to send the people and their problems away, but he says, "You give them something."

Offering our little faith and resources for Christ to multiply is God's call to us—as a parish and as individuals.

As Anglican Priest and author J. B. Phillips wrote way back in 1956:

"I am convinced that there will be no recovery of the vitality and vigor of New Testament Christianity until we who call ourselves Christian dare to

break through contemporary habits of thought and **touch the resources of God.**" New Testament Christianity, J.B. Phillips, page 52