



**THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
AUGUST 2, 2020
MATTHEW 14: 13-21
“AN ABUNDANT MINDSET”**

When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.”

Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

“We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered.

“Bring them here to me,” he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

SERMON

We don’t see things as they are. We see things as we are.

This perspective is central to our understanding this morning, because many of us might hear the story of the feeding of the 5000 and conclude: “yeah, I’ve heard this before. It’s a miracle. End of story.”



So, I'm asking you to set aside any notion of miracle in order to take in the deeper meanings....

When Jesus walked the earth, there were many holy men whose followers told stories about wondrous acts. Actually, they were commonplace. Miraculous healings and feedings. The raising of the dead.

Even so, this story seems central to our understanding material and spiritual reality. Aside from the crucifixion, the feeding of the 5000 is the only story recorded in all four gospels.

John is the most adamant about such signs of wonder being signs of the character of the God whose presence among us Jesus proclaims.

And this God is different. In the first century, the gods of the philosophers were distant, dispassionate beings. Or they were involved with supporting Greek and roman empires, always on the side of the rich and powerful.

In fact, Jesus withdraws from the crowds to mourn the death of john the baptizer, whose bloody murder has come at the hands of the roman bureaucrat, hero.

Up to this point, the world has not heard of a God who sides with the oppressed, the ordinary, the marginalized, the hungry, and the poor.

So, let's try to see things as they are from this God's point of view....

Jesus has gone off by himself to grieve the death of john and, instead of getting a bit of a break, the crowds follow him.

Now me, immediately I would have been hacked off.

"Can't I get a moment to myself?"

"How about giving me a break, here?"

"Don't you know I just lost my best friend?"



Notice that the focus is on me and my well-being.

So rather than focusing on the question “how did Jesus multiply loaves and fishes, let’s focus on the question, “why did Jesus multiply the loaves and fishes?”

Why? Because Jesus has compassion for the crowd. He sets aside his own sorrow and turns his attention to the crowd.

Compassion means having empathy and sorrow for another person stricken by misfortune, along with a strong desire to alleviate the suffering....

We all suffer in a variety of ways. The image of the God/human Jesus nailed to the cross of his existence declares in stark terms that suffering is the way of the world.

And suffering scars the soul. Our suffering can be so painful as to strip us of hope, leave us with constant unhappiness, and stamp out any sense of trust in life. Suffering can make us fearful about the future. We can remain constricted by PTSD, chronic anxiety, burnout, and despair.

Suffering also has the power to change the way we see. Our hearts and minds become open to the suffering of others. Having experienced suffering and some degree of healing, we are open to greater inner resources. Having experienced post-traumatic growth, the adversity kindles in us stronger compassion for others.

We can be present to others in their suffering and we find ways to alleviate the suffering around us. We can gain resilience. Our hearts and minds can grow in the ability to give and receive kindness.

We can reach a point where, as Jesus says, our right hand does not know what our left hand is doing. Without thinking, without judgment, we naturally respond to whatever suffering we encounter along the way....

The theme of this story is not some physical miracle, but the graceful nature of God. Grace is whatever comes our way that is undeserved....



The good old apostles stand in for all of us. Just like them, we imagine a world of scarcity. The apostles tell Jesus, “it’s getting late and we’re miles from a shop n save. People are getting hungry. They need to head back to their towns to get their own food.”

“No,” says Jesus, “you give them something to eat.”

“What? Are you nuts? We have five loaves and two fish.”

Unless we have been transformed by the spirit of Christ, this is our mindset. It is a worldview of scarcity. There’s not enough to go around.

Because we operate out of a scarcity model, we eventually create systems where there is scarcity. Not enough land, not enough healthcare, not enough food, not enough water, not enough money, not enough housing, not even enough guns to keep us safe.

Except our senate can find enough money to propose adding 8 billion dollars for weapons into a bill that will give \$200 a month to people trying to live through the pandemic.

Let’s call that what it is. Inhumane, cruel, vicious, and evil. It’s catastrophic that we have such people in congress. Eight billion dollars for weapons in the face of the greatest economic constriction on record. So, there is enough to go around, but only if people of goodwill are in charge.

Even many Christian faith communities live out of a model of scarcity.

Keep the budget as low as possible rather than support a vision of caring for the down-and-out. Don’t spend that investment money. There might come a day when we don’t have enough people to keep the doors open and we’ll need that money.

Hey, if you can’t attract enough people to your door, then you need to shut the door.



For God's worldview, revealed in Jesus, is a world of abundance.

In his exuberance, Matthew has to point out in a rather sexist way that 5000 men were fed, in addition to some women and children.

And twelve baskets are left over.

A system of scarcity rest on the foundation that that we are separate from one another. In a world of scarcity, it's every person for himself or herself. We accept the spiritually bankrupt picture of a world where it is right and normal and even God-ordained that one person has 90 billion dollars and the next person doesn't have a pot to piss in.

And what is sad is that some of you will be more offended that I used the word piss in a sermon than you are about the disparity between the haves and the have nots.

What is wrong with this picture?

I invite each one of you to come and volunteer in our food ministry and then tell me how you feel and think about the condition of our country. It just might change your perspective on the world....

There is more than enough for our need but never enough for our greed.

Jesus wants to move us from a worldview that is bankrupt where there is just not enough, including not enough God and not enough me to an awareness that, in the midst of structural stinginess, we can have our consciousness raised and we can operate out of mercy and graciousness....

A man named Origen was one of the great teachers of the ancient church. He said of the Christ, that he was "broken up and thinned out" in order to be available to all living things.

It is a christ-ified world. A world of blessed plenty. A sacred world where the divine is present "in, with and under" all humanity in its diversity, all throughout



the animal kingdom, all throughout the world of nature. If only we have eyes to see and ears to hear. Such a worldview is healing in and of itself....

Yet in each generation, psychological disorders rise and then fade away. Each dominant psychological disorder tells us something about ourselves. For example, in Freud's day, hysteria was a common diagnosis as were what we call garden variety neuroses. We hardly ever run across a hysteric in the 21st century. Why? Hysteria comes from too much closeness in relationships. And today, we have the opposite problem: there is far too much distance in our relationships.

Today, the most prevalent diagnoses are various degrees of narcissistic disorder. Serious disorders like these cause damage to others. Narcissists are grandiose and entitled. The rules don't apply to them. Narcissists lack empathy. They cannot connect to another person's suffering.

Even with enough material blessings, people with narcissistic injuries feel empty inside. Let's be compassionate, not judgmental toward those who try to fill this emptiness with alcohol, food, drugs, sex, and gambling addictions.

Long ago, Carl Jung wrote that unless the soul of a person is filled with the spirit of God, the soul will tend to be filled with evil or be a victim of evil. He wrote, "an ordinary man, not protected by an action from above and isolated from society, cannot resist the power of evil...."

Yet another change in our psychological landscape is the prevalence of hoarding. Outsized emotional significance become attached to external objects. They cannot be casually discarded because to the person it feels that "if I throw away too much, there'll be nothing left of me."

A challenge for us all is that the mind cannot conceive of anything being infinite or eternal. The mind cannot imagine a God whose mercy is everlasting or of a grace which builds upon grace, as John writes elsewhere.

Most often, we need an experience of unconditional, unearned, and infinite love. Without such an experience, we hold onto our world of scarcity....



The spiritual teacher, Pema Chodron, has a little book, comfortable with uncertainty. In it she writes about generosity:

The essence of generosity is letting go. Pain is always a sign that we are holding onto something—usually ourselves. When we feel unhappy, when we feel inadequate, we get stingy, we hold on tight.

Generosity is an activity that loosens us up. By offering whatever we can—a dollar, a flower, a word of encouragement—we are training in letting go.

The point isn't so much what we give, but that we unlock our habit of clinging.

Soulfully, what is inside is outside

If our inner life is filled with abundance, we will be able to give of ourselves and our resources to those in need

If we become aware, we are surrounded by the spirit of Christ in our suffering, we will be able to be with others in their suffering

If we have experienced undeserved, unconditional love, we will be able to love those around us

When we live in God's abundance, that abundance flows through us

Now, more than ever, we need people of goodwill, blessed with God's grace, who are able to share an abundant mind with the world

SERMON SONG

Have A Little Faith in Me (John Hiatt)