

August 6-Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

Introduction for the Day

Jesus tells stories about what God's rule might be like. Now he goes to the wilderness to seek healing for himself as he grieves the death of his cousin murdered for speaking out against injustice. Crowds follow. Jesus feels deeply for these people so he heals and feeds them. That's the rule of heaven lived out.

Gospel Reading

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.

Sermon

Jesus has gone into a deserted place seeking comfort after his cousin's murder most foul-committed by the ones charged to lead and provide for their people. Crowds traipse through the wilderness to follow Jesus—do you suppose at the time people were reminded of the Exodus and the trek through the wilderness that lasted generations? Matthew notices. He even

tosses out a few references as bread crumbs for us to follow...the word he uses for walking and the number of the crowd “plus women and children” are snippets from the beloved story of God liberating people and providing for them during their time in the desert. Sounds like we’re getting a glimpse of God’s rule in action. Matthew’s detail is part of a word for the church too.

Do you suppose when the disciples were with Jesus in the upper room at Passover they remembered Jesus taking bread, blessing it, breaking it and giving it to all those people in that desolate place at that late hour? Matthew remembers. More than clever story-telling, Matthew gives us a glimpse into God’s self-expression in Jesus’ life. We’re invited to follow in the disciples steps too.

We know the hour is late. The place is lonely. There is hardly enough food to go around. All true. The disciples’ concern for the crowd’s welfare is well placed. Then Jesus tells them “you give them something to eat”.

Might Jesus’ words to his apprentices be a word for the church? The disciples have a firm grasp of reality. So does Jesus. The teacher’s response is as confounding as the parables. “Feed them already.” The bass and baguettes could hardly feed a crowd big enough to pack a hockey arena.

Notice how things unfold...Jesus says, “Give the people something to eat”. We have no clue how God’s abundance comes about. Sort of reminds you of the story John tells about water turned to wine...all most people knew was there was lots of really good wine at that party in Cana.

Here’s where we tread carefully when it comes to that word to the faithful and word to the church. We mistakenly believe if we chip in a bit, that prompts God to dole out piles of matching funds from the cosmic bankroll and THAT is the recipe for success in every batch.

Matthew probably told the story of the feeding because it was a singular event. One that John would call a sign that points to God's abundance—especially the abundant presence of a risen Christ that permeates our lives.

So, church, we pay attention to whom we follow—the embodiment of God's inexhaustible compassion. We don't have to ignore reality. We just have to feed people in whatever ways we can...and let God be God and do what God does. One day- Tikkun Olam. The repair of all things.