

Sermon for August 3rd, 2014

Eighth Sunday of Pentecost, Matthew 14:13-21

BLESSINGS TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

One day this past week Pastor Bob Odden came to my office so we could talk about some **ideas** for the Life-Long Learning class for this fall—ideas which he shared with you this morning. I **enjoy** having conversations with him as he has been a pastor for a **number** of years and he has a great **wealth** of knowledge. As he and I talked the conversation turned to the topic of preaching and how **often times** the Holy Spirit, through the happenings of the week, gives us unexpected insights, events, and/or opportunities to see **God's** hand at work in the world.

On Tuesday, after reading our lessons for this morning, I began to notice a couple of events which pointed to not **only** our gospel reading but to our Old Testament reading as well as **each** of these readings, in their **own** way, **point** to the Spirit of the Lord at work through God's abundance, God's glory, God's grace, and God's compassion toward those who are in a **time** of need.

The **first** thing I noticed is that I was getting called with a number of requests for food cards from people whom I had not met before. When I talked with them they told me that they had **nothing to eat** and they were **not sure** where their next meal was going to come from. They **also** told me that they had been

referred by a friend or family member to **reach out** to us here at Eden to see if there was anything we could do to help them in the way of getting some food. It was good to hear that our church is making a difference and becoming known as a place where people can **feel safe** to call upon for help or referrals in their time of need.

The **other** thing that happened is that I got an email from Harvey Clark, who happens to be on vacation in Nebraska, asking me if I had seen the recent issue of *National Geographic*.// Honestly, no I had not.// Harvey told me to look at pages **67-89**. It is an article entitled “*The New Face of Hunger*”. It says that *millions of working Americans don't know where their next meal is coming from*. He told me to look **specifically** at pages **86-87** where the counties in the U.S. are graphed out given their various hunger needs. The **largest amount** of food need in this country is in 4 counties. One is in **Alaska** which has a 93% Native American population, and the other 3 are in **South Dakota**. *Any guess where??* (PAUSE) They are **Shannon and Bennett** counties—on the Pine Ridge reservation, and in **Todd County** which is on the Rosebud Lakota reservation right next to Pine Ridge. **3 of these 4** counties because of their high level of poverty and unemployment have **over 54%** of their population on what used to be called food stamps.

Now you may be thinking, I did not come here today to hear a **statistics** report or hear about **hunger** in this country and that is true. My **point** is that things

have not changed all that much for us in this world since biblical times when it comes to the issues of the day.

As we look closer at our **1st reading** for today—the prophet Isaiah called the people who **thirst**, to come to the **waters**, you with no money, **come, buy, and eat**, without money or without price. Isaiah told them to come and have an abundant life in the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, the one who had **glorified** them. God is in the midst of all. Isaiah called **everyone** who hungers, thirsts, everyone who has no money, come listen and live.

In our gospel reading for today we hear the **only miracle story** which is recorded in all 4 gospels. It is the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. But let us backup for just one moment. **Right before** our today's reading in Matthew 14:1-12 is the story of how **King Herod** in all his kingly glory, at his **lavish** banquet, had Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist, **beheaded** and his head brought to him on a platter.

Here we come to the **beginning** of our gospel reading where Matthew begins, *'Now when Jesus heard this'*. In these few words, Matthew is showing us what kind of God Jesus represents by **moving our attention** to the place where Jesus withdrew in a boat to a **deserted** place by himself—for some alone time—seemingly to gather thoughts and be with God. Matthew draws a **stark contrast** between the **lavishness**, the **extravagance**, and the **excess** of King Herod in the

previous verses to bring us to the place where Jesus **withdrew** to a deserted place.

But, Jesus' alone time did not last for long. The crowds who **most likely** either did not have or could not afford to rent a boat to get to where Jesus was—followed him on foot.

Here is the **heart of the reading** and the **heart of God's and Jesus'** feeling for His people, "When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick." **Compassion:** in this miracle story Jesus renews, exemplifies, and fulfills the **consistent call** of the God of Israel to **feed the hungry** just as God **fed the Israelites** with manna when they were hungry and in need in their own wilderness journey.

Much like the 'new' U.S. government term '**food insecure**' which replaced the word '**hunger**' in 2006, the people of Jesus' time were no strangers to what it meant to be hungry and in need. So the disciples' **suggestion** that the thousands of people *go away into the villages and buy food for themselves* was not only **unrealistic**, it was a bit **ridiculous** as the people who made up this huge crowd probably did not have money to buy food in the **first** place. Jesus tells his disciples to basically '**get over**' their self-concern—**give** them something to eat—**feed** them yourselves.

This is where Jesus uses the disciples to tend to the needs of these thousands of men, women, and children. Using the words and actions which will foreshadow

the **Last Supper**, Matthew moves us from a worldview of scarcity—‘*we have nothing here but 5 loaves and 2 fish*’—to one of abundance—‘*taking the 5 loaves and 2 fish, he looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples*’. We do not know **how** the disciples reacted but they seemed to be caught up in Jesus’ words of abundance and gratitude as they **distributed** what they had and **participated** in the wonder and joy that ‘*all ate and were filled*’ and not **only** ate and were filled—but there were 12 **full** baskets of broken pieces left over.

The disciples who wanted to send everybody away did just as Jesus said and served the food to the hungry crowds around them. God **used** the disciples, **reluctant** as they were, **to care for** the poor and hungry that God loves so much. As **amazing** as it may seem, it is like the miracle happened somehow in the giving. By setting aside their own concerns, their fears, and their doubts, the disciples **became avenues** by which God’s **miraculous work** was completed.

Possibly this is a lesson for us as well. When we let go of our fears and our concerns about our **own well being** and **open our hearts** to the people we encounter with a giving spirit of the Lord—whether here in Riverside or anywhere we go—we become **channels of divine compassion** that truly can have a miraculous effect.

Our compassion and giving, whether it is by giving Stater Bros gift cards to the people who come to Eden, or giving food to LSS or CCLM or Riverside City Mission, or going on a mission trip hundreds of miles away to somewhere we have **never been before** to help those in need, if we will give what we have, perhaps in the giving it will be **multiplied** to meet the needs of those we serve. When we give out God's compassion and generosity freely, we **never know** how far out the ripples can extend. This ripple effect is far beyond our ability to **explain** or even **imagine**. When we open ourselves to give, the streams of God's **compassion**, God's **grace**, God's **kindness**, and God's **mercy** that flow through us have an effect on **others** and on **ourselves** as well.

These unexpected insights, events, and/or opportunities to see **God at work** in the world are truly a gift from **God and the Holy Spirit** working in us and thru us. All thanks be to God. **AMEN.**