

The Feeding of the Five Thousand – The Compassion of Jesus

Isaiah 55:1-5

Psalm 136

Romans 9:1-13

Matthew 14:13-21

Grace, Peace, and Mercy from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ

This morning's gospel begins with a death notice. Jesus has received the news that John the Baptist, His cousin is dead. John had been languishing in Herod's prison for calling Herod out for marrying brother's wife. Then at Herod's Birthday party Salome dances before Herod and his friends and Herod is so pleased that he is willing to give her half the kingdom. Instead, at the request of her mother, Salome asks for the head of John the Baptist. Not to be embarrassed in front of everyone Herod grants the request, despite his misgivings about following through.

Jesus has now received this news. Jesus' ministry had been in full swing, the blind had been receiving their sight, the deaf are hearing, the sick are healed, the lame are walking, the lepers are being cleansed, the dead being raised, the poor are having the Good News preached to them. Jesus had been doing some pretty miraculous deeds, making God's power known, and all these deeds would point Jesus as the Messiah. Now with this news of the forerunner of Jesus is dead, it is time to get away and rest. It is a time for Jesus to grieve and to be with those to whom he is close to.

Maybe we would have the same reaction at such bad news. To get away and be with people we are in close relationship with, to hold each other up, to encourage, and just be there for one another. So Jesus withdraws to lonely a place for this purpose. Yes, even as the Son of God, Jesus lived fully in the human nature with all these feelings and emotions while simultaneously living fully in His divine nature.

But then the last happens, particularly if you are one who wants to get away. The crowds hear about it and go to where Jesus is to the lonely place to receive hope and healing. And when Jesus arrives, he looks up and there they are. A mass of hurting humanity, struggling with hopelessness, various diseases, and struggling to eke out a life under Herod's rule. What does Jesus do? Would he send them away telling them to wait till next week when it would be a better time? Jesus doesn't do that! Matthew reports, "And He had compassion for them, and cured their sick."

Jesus' compassion for the people overrides everything that may have been going on in His life. When He sees the people, he feels everything that they are going through. He feels sadness, all their hurts, all their despair. He doesn't feel it all in his heart, or he doesn't intellectually feel it. He Feels all their humanity right here in his gut. If you translate the word for compassion literally in this story, "His guts were moved." Have you ever had that experience yourself? A friend receives bad news, a death notice, do you feel their grief in your gut? A part of the compassion for another is moving to place where you feel with them, trying to get where the other person is. Though we may not get there perfectly, we have savior who can and does. There is one more aspect of compassion that I would like to highlight: It is a action that is not practical. It times it goes against the human tendency to do what is not practical or what makes sense. It would have made sense for Jesus to tell the crowds to go home that this was not a good time to for me to minister to you. And we would say, we understand, your cousin was executed by King Herod. But Jesus' compassion, feeling their broken humanity moved Him to do the impractical action. Being compassionate is also inconvenient. It takes times when we could be doing in our mind better things.

This idea about the being practical, do the thing that makes sense and doing the convenient thing comes up in this story on the part of the disciples. "The disciples came to Him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and hour is now late, send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for them themselves.'" If you ask me, that makes sense, that sounds like the practical thing to do.

Now Jesus feeling hunger pangs of the great crowd before him is now ready to teach His disciples a lesson in compassion. "You need not send them away, you give them something to eat." Jesus is teaching them to go beyond what is practical. And being practical disciples, they respond, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." Then Jesus asks, Bring them to me." With the disciples it was we "only have", now we learn with Jesus there is no such thing as "only." When you have Jesus there is no "only." In Jesus we have everything. Enough to feed 5,000 men, plus women and children.

In small congregations like our own, it is easy to do what might seem practical and easy and convenient. We look at other churches and the programs and what seems like endless resources and say "if only we had what they had." Don't think like that. Think of what we have. With Jesus there is no "only." And another thing, with Jesus there are no lonely or desolate places either! The presence of Jesus fills our lives and our church with His fullness and gives us everything we need to be a compassionate, caring and giving congregation that God is calling us to be!

So Jesus takes the bread and fish and looking up to His Father blesses them and instructs the disciples to do what he instructed them to do earlier. Give them something to eat. Jesus felt their rumbling and hungering stomachs in his own gut and feed them all and they all ate and were satisfied. And there was more than enough. Now all are ready to go home, healed, fed, satisfied and content.

The God who is not practical, but compassionate shows us who Jesus is. We have a God who cares for the needs of the people, and provides. Not just Physically, but also spiritually, for we are both.

For when you have Jesus you everything, more than enough. And this is shown when the meal had ended, they collected the leftovers. Twelve baskets of broken pieces.

Now Jesus having been compassionate, invites us now into a life of compassionate service. Like the disciples He gives you the gifts to live this life. Yes, it may not be practical, and may interrupt a time set aside for Rest and Relaxation. Sometimes it may move us to do the impractical action. To do things that make no earthly sense. It may call us to go out of the way.

Like the couple who gave Tom's family a ride to the FD Hospital, which for them it interrupted their plans, and probably took them out of the way. But they were moved to respond to a family in crisis. The love Christ in one's life moves the Christ to compassion.

For Jesus, being practical would have to choose better disciples, this group he had was quite a bunch. Or maybe He could choose a better Christian I find myself saying about myself. Then again God who is compassionate choose you, knowing and feeling your sinful humanity did the impractical thing by taking yours and my broken humanity all the way to the cross so that we may be His own. And so you are. A Child of God.

So we now serve the one who has everything. In Jesus Like Father, Like Son, Like Son, Like Christian. For when you have done it to the least of these Jesus says you have done it to me.

May the peace of God which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds inn Christ Jesus.
Amen.