

PENTECOST 9 MEDITATION

AUGUST 2, 2020

THIS SUNDAY SUMMER SERVICE AT ST ANDREW'S OUTDOORS

AT 9:00 A.M.

SIGN-IN ON WEB SITE OR BY CHURCH PHONE MESSAGE

Dear Friends,

This Sunday's gospel is beloved because it tells the story of God's compassion and care in contrast to the empire's injustice and violence. What's more impressive is the method of the lesson with the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 with plenty of leftovers. It sends the message of radical inclusivity and fulfillment in the Kingdom of God.

This time of pandemic has challenged all of us in ways we could not have known before it leveled us with interruption, fear of scarcity, fear of illness and death, joblessness, loss of precious time with family and friends and the joy of worshipping together at St. Andrew's.

Yet in our lesson for today, we are reminded once again, that it is when we are on our knees, shouting at God, or someone else to blame, grief stricken, or think we have nothing more to give, Christ breaks open the heart of God to share divine love and compassion upon us that sustains us. When we are most lost, Jesus finds us.

As I contemplate my vacation, please know that I shall keep you all close in my prayers. **Should there be a pastoral emergency, please contact Mary Maker or Dee McRae who will reach out to me in my travels.** We have been through so much together these past months and I am forever grateful for your generous continued support of our dear St. Andrew's.

Loving God as a mother tenderly gathers her children and as a father joyfully welcomes his own, so in the compassion of Jesus you nurture and nourish us, feed us and heal us. Let the bread Jesus multiplied then in the wilderness be broken and shared among us now. May the communion we experience with each other in this holy meal, compel us to seek communion with everyone in loving service toward all. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.
From Prayers for Sunday and Seasons, Year A, Peter J. Scagnelli, LTP, 1992.

Faithfully, Beverly

PENTECOST PATHWAYS

AUGUST 2, 2020

COLLECT

Let your continual mercy, O Lord, cleanse and defend your Church; and, because it cannot continue in safety without your help, protect and govern it always by your goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

LESSONS: Isaiah 55:1-5, Psalm 145: 8-9, 15-22, Romans 8:26-39, Matthew 14:13-21

We've Got Nothing

We frequently find ourselves caught in the midst of seemingly unresolved tension especially during this time of pandemic. Planning ahead remains fraught with anxieties. There was definitely a time a few months ago when we wondered where the next roll of tissue would be coming from, the next roll of Bounty Paper Towels, Lysol Spray and Purell Hand Sanitizer and worse yet, face masks would be in stock. You could say fears of **scarcity** were the driving force for all of us to some degree then and perhaps now.

This was no less true for landscape in the time of Jesus. The context of today's story of the feeding of more than 5,000 people is one of extreme political and socio-economic corruption, oppression and violence, exclusion, and mass poverty. Food and justice **scarcity** were the bookends of King Herod's reign.

An important message in this gospel text comes as the reading begins "Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself" (Matthew 14:13). What is the "this" that Jesus had heard? The news of John the Baptist's murder. The passage immediately prior to our reading recounts the murder of John the Baptist at the hands of Herod, Herodias, and her daughter.

That section ends, "John's disciples came and took the headless body and buried it; then they went and told Jesus"—who then in turn withdrew to a deserted place to be by himself. We can only imagine Jesus' grief and the mourning over the death of John. It is no wonder that Jesus attempts to "withdraw" by boat to a deserted place by himself.

This sets the stage for a view of contrasting works of power: the power of political depravity shown by the beheading of John at a palace birthday party versus the power of compassion and love and **abundance** in a deserted place. Matthew could hardly have drawn the contrast more sharply.

Of course, we know that Jesus cannot get off alone. As much as he seeks privacy in prayer, an impressively large crowd of people, men, women, and children, we are told, walk around the Sea of Galilee to be with him. He needs privacy and solitude. The people are sick and hungry. His needs and theirs are in tension.

This tension is resolved, we are told, by his compassion for them. His compassion is the ability to be compelled by the needs of others and then move toward them in mercy. Compassion seems to precede privacy and prayer.

And this is good news, right? Why? Among other reasons, because it means that when we suffer and raise our prayers and groans to God, we can rely on the fact that God will hear our words, see our suffering, and that God will care—God will feel compassion for us.

The next conflict of interest and tension arises when his disciples recognize that resources are short; it was getting late, so the crowds should be dismissed to fend for themselves. That is, the disciples, the followers of Jesus, believe it is Jesus' responsibility to dismiss the crowds, and the crowd's responsibility to feed themselves.

The compassion of Jesus does not see it this way. "They need not go away," he says, "you give them something to eat."

If you listen deeply to the text, you can hear the disciples' stammering, flabbergasted astonishment. Stuttering and a little bit outraged, I love the first three words of their response even more than I love Jesus words. They say: "**We've got nothing.**" Well, except for just 2-1/2 fish sandwiches between the 12 of them. Not really even enough for themselves and Jesus. So yeah, "**We've got next to nothing.**"

And with that, Jesus multiplied the food, fed the multitude, and had plenty left over. In a scene that is overflowing with Eucharistic overtones, **Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to the disciples to give away.** In effect

he turns to the crowd and says, "This is all that we have. It isn't much, but what is ours is yours. Here, take it and eat."

This is a discipleship story, one that needs to be internalized. From the diagnosis of the problem to the distribution of the bread the disciples are involved. We are involved. What the story has to say about our role and responsibility in God's kingdom is as essential to our being Christians as breathing air and drinking water are to life itself.

But of course, the story does not end there. The compassionate Jesus and the ministry of his disciples offered all they had which turned out to be enough to feed a multitude. "And all ate and were filled." No one was left out, all were filled! They were satisfied. **There was great abundance** and food left over. "And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full."

This story means to propel us from our economies of scarcity in which acquiring, accumulating, consuming and protecting goods are marks of our culture and presumed good self-sufficient citizenship and into becoming citizens of the Way of Jesus that recognizes an economy of **shared abundance for all**.

This is where the power of Jesus really lies. It is a power that continues to threaten a King and all that believe in his model of power and authority. It is a power that is moved by the needs of others and then moves toward them in mercy.

The good news is that on that day beside the lake of Galilee, two thousand years ago, the powers at work in Jesus were given to all who will follow him and live in his way. This power has been taken, blessed, broken, and given to us all. Bring what we have to him and **witness the abundance** that results.

And, that's good news for days in the middle of global pandemic when you, too, feel like, "I've got nothing—or next to nothing." I've got next to nothing left for my people, next to nothing left for this ministry, next to nothing left for my family and friends, next to nothing left for this moment.

Good news. Next to nothing is Jesus' favorite thing to work with. Amen.

