

No Time to Eat

Matthew 14:13-21

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, (Aug. 2) 2020

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*For many were coming and going, and they did not have time even to eat.*

-Mark 6:31

Jesus has just heard that his cousin and good friend, John the Baptist, has been executed by Herod. He is grieving. He is tired. The God Movement is costly. And all of these people keep crowding in around him who have no idea of the sacrifice in front of them. Those with the power are going to try to put a stop to all of this, sooner or later. Jesus knows that a lot of people are going to die; old Herod will probably come after him.

Grief, confusion, lots going on. Minds reeling, shock, tumult, people going every which a way. Mark says, “For many were coming and going, and they did not have time even to eat” (Mk. 6:31).

You ever have days like that? Have you had seasons like that? Maybe times like now? We are grieving, people are sick and dying, our world is changing, violent racism, autocrats lash out with paramilitary on the streets. At the same time, there is so much to do, and so many people with so many needs, and each need is urgent. Many emergencies going on at one time. So much going on that we eat on the run, if we eat, at all.

Jesus is overwhelmed, so he withdraws. He tries to find a place to rest, think, pray. He gets in a boat and goes to a deserted place, out in the middle of nowhere. Out in the wilderness. Remember that in the Bible, the wilderness always carries a thickness of meaning. The wilderness is where all norms are stripped away, all reliable grounding is removed, where you're walking the edge of chaos and confusion. In the wilderness there is only one who can be depended on: God. So, Jesus goes out in the wilderness to be close to God. Nevertheless, the crowds find out where he is and even though they have a long walk, people gather around him. They come from miles to be near Jesus and to hear Jesus.

As tired and weary and full of grief as he is, Jesus sees all of these people and has compassion on them. He preaches, teaches, and begins to heal them. But the day grows late, and no one has anything to eat.

So, Austin Heights Baptist Church goes to Jesus and says, "Jesus, it's time to quit. We've worked hard helping all these people but it's time to send all of these folk home, so they can eat." Jesus says to us, "You feed them." And we reply, "Feed them? Us? We don't have enough to feed all of these people! We're a small church with limited resources; we only have five loaves of bread and a couple of fish. Besides, to be honest Jesus, we're overwhelmed with 'compassion fatigue.' We can't care for one more person and for one more cause."

Jesus says, "Bring me what you have." Then he takes these limited resources, these five loaves of bread and two fish, and blesses it, breaks it, and

gives it away. And wonder of wonders, everyone is fed. Everyone in this big crowd of over 5,000 people are fed. In fact, there is so much food that we end up gathering twelve basketfuls of leftovers when everyone leaves. Food just overflows everywhere.

For most of us, we operate in a world that teaches us a sense of scarcity. We are trained to grab, hoard, accumulate, pile up, and guard. As soon as we can talk, we are able to say, “Mine!” And these days, in the chaotic pandemic, we’re even more mindful of scarcity.

I’m told that one reason why a dog gobbles down his food so quickly is that for the first few million years, when dogs lived in the wild, food was a rarity. When a kill was made, all the dogs gathered around the carcass and wolfed down the meat. Eat fast unless another dog gets the meat.

So, to this day, our pet dogs still gobble down their food, even though he’s the only there with plenty to eat and all of the time in the world to eat.

When our instincts tell us that there’s not enough – not enough to eat, not enough to share, not enough open our arms, not enough time – then there is the tendency to hunker down, bunker up, build walls, and get our guns.

Years ago, I remember a young mother of one child asking, “How do you have enough love for two children?” Veteran mom Ruth Carroll in our church, mother of four, said, “When you have a second, somehow or another, there is more

than enough love for both of them. Somehow love grows.” Which reminds me of writer Anne Lamott’s comment on having enough love to go around. She said, “It’s not pie. It’s not as if you take one piece of pie and there is less to go around.” In other words, love is expansive.

Some time ago, I talked to an elementary school teacher of thirty years. I asked her how she stayed with it. She said that the only way she could keep going is to stay focused on the children. She said, “I’ve found that love is a renewable resource; the more you give it away, the more you get. In giving you receive.”

Here is the opposite of what we commonly call “burn-out.” Burn-out is a peculiarly modern term which comes from the image of a rocket engine with a limited amount of fuel. As the rocket goes upward, it eventually uses up all of its fuel and reaches burn-out. Burn-out means the fuel is gone.

God’s Way is not the way of burn out. Of course, you have to be fueled by God, rooted in God, fed and nourished by God. When we do that, there is more than enough fuel.

When will we learn to trust Jesus? Jesus feeds us, like God fed the children of Israel with manna long before. And like God fed the prophet Elijah. They were all in the wilderness when they were fed, and they all learned that in God there was more than enough to go around. Now they didn’t get all they wanted but they got more than they needed. And that’s the important thing. To learn and trust that God’s abundance gives us all we need.

Tom Long tells the story of one of his theology students going home for the holidays. The student was walking with his father, talking about what he was learning, about the church, about ministry, and so on. As they talked, they decided they would find a pay phone (back in the pay phone days) and call home to see if they needed to stop and bring a pizza home with them for dinner.

On their way toward looking for a pay phone, they were met by a homeless man who asked them, “Can you spare any change?”

The father reached into his pocket and pulled out a handful of change, held it out to the man, and said, “Here, take what you need.”

The homeless man smiled, held out his hands, and took all of their change. Then they parted.

Heading down the street, the young man and his father realized that they had given away all of their change. They needed a quarter to make their phone call. Turning back, they called to the homeless man.

“We forgot that we needed to make a phone call. Can you give us back a quarter?”

The homeless man smiled, reached into his pocket, pulled out all of the change and said, “Here, take what you need.”

The homeless man knew all that he had was a gift. Grace. And even though it seemed to be only a pocketful of change, there was a sense of abundance instead of scarcity.

When will we learn to trust Jesus? When will we learn some of his effusive, expansive, gracious lessons?

Stop. Sit down. God gives us the time to eat. Jesus says, “Here, take what you need. There is more than enough.”

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One True God, Mother of us all. Amen.