

## More Than Enough

Matthew 14:13-21

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, (Aug. 6) 2023

Kyle Childress

Jesus has just heard that his cousin and good friend, John the Baptist, has been executed by Herod. He is grieving. He is anxious and he is tired and needs to get away by himself for prayer, rest, and to think about what's next. 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 is never just the wilderness. The wilderness is where all norms are stripped away, all reliable grounding is removed, where you're walking the edge of chaos and confusion. Jesus knows that in the wilderness the only thing you can count on is God, so Jesus goes to be with God.

Matthew tells us that nevertheless the crowds find Jesus. To help us understand the crowds, let's use our imagination a little.

Joanna Macy, environmental writer and Buddhist scholar, says that in the world we're living in today there are three primary stories we tell ourselves and through which we interpret the world (see her book *Active Hope*). The first is "Business as Usual." I don't think there were very many of the "Business as Usual" people in the crowd that day. They were all back in Jerusalem and were generally fine with the way the world was working and in denial about any disruption or failure.

But I imagine that the crowd that day had a lot of people who didn't see the world that way. They knew that things were not working, and it seemed to them

that everything was falling apart. A lot of them were angry and fearful. Some of them might have worn red ballcaps that day. Some didn't but they all agreed that "Business as Usual" was a failure. Macy calls this story, the "Great Unraveling." For most of the crowd that day, the world was unraveling.

The crowds of people find him and though he is tired and weary and full of grief, Jesus sees all 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, we've all worked hard helping all these people but it's time to send them 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 these people! We are stretched beyond our limits as it is. We're running way behind in our budget, it's August, some of us are angry at one another and hurt, we're exhausted – in the last two days we packed 250 backpacks for back to school and then passed them out yesterday at the park in 100-degree heat, had kids in theater camp, had a Harry Potter birthday party at the library, and have a mission team on the border! Besides that, we only have five loaves of bread and a couple of fish. To be honest Jesus, we're overwhelmed with 'compassion fatigue.' We can't care for one more person or for one more cause."

Jesus says, "Gather up all you have and bring it to me." Then Jesus takes these limited resources, these five loaves of bread and two fish, and blesses them, breaks them, and gives them 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 spend half of the night gathering twelve basketfuls of leftovers when everyone leaves. Food just overflows everywhere.

For most of us, when our instincts tell us that there's not enough – not enough to eat, not enough to share, not enough money, not enough to open our arms, not enough time, not enough energy – we tend to hunker down, bunker up, build walls, and isolate ourselves. We disconnect from each other because we don't feel we have anymore to give – financially, emotionally, and spiritually.

Matthew is reminding us that our calling is to trust Jesus more than we trust our fears. Jesus feeds us, like God fed the children of Israel with manna long before. Having just left the unjust but reliable empire, they entered the wilderness of the unknown, and discovered that God fed them. In God there was more than enough to go around.

Many New Testament scholars believe that what happened that day is that when Jesus received and shared the five loaves and two fish, he set an example that inspired everyone to share what they had. The people in the crowd remembered their own sack lunches they had with them and opened them and shared with each other.

The summer I was 17 years old, I was in the cheap seats on a train between Rome and Florence, Italy. We stopped on the outskirts of Rome, and a large Italian family got on our car – grandparents, parents, children, teenagers, toddlers, and among them someone carried a wooden cage with two chickens squawking in it, one little boy was leading a goat on a rope. From my teenage American perspective, they seemed to be out of central casting, loud and talking and laughing, carrying all sorts of baskets and bags. Soon after the train got going, out of the baskets and bags came homemade loaves of bread and cheese, wine, and on and on. They started sharing with one another, loud, laughing, speaking in dramatic Italian. The grandma asked me, in her broken English if I'd like

something to eat. “Please join us. Come on! Eat! You an American boy?! I have a brother in Houston. Come! Enjoy! There is plenty!”

I wonder if that is what it was like that day with Jesus. People accustomed to isolating themselves, tired, living apart, separate, and suspicious watched Jesus and started sharing like Jesus. People started talking and found out they had more in common than they realized. Separate people became neighbors. They shared and laughed and perhaps even cried together. “Come! Enjoy! There is plenty!”

This is a picture of what economist Kate Raworth calls “doughnut economics.” Instead of endless growth capitalism, this is a regenerative, circular economy of sharing, nurture, repair and maintenance, recycling and upcycling. “In a circular economy, there is no waste; there are only resources in the wrong place... It is an economy that seeks to eliminate waste,” she says, “and a society that does not waste will no longer treat its members as disposable” (quoted in *Parenting in a Changing Climate* by Elizabeth Bechard, p. 97).

Perhaps this is also what Joanna Macy calls the third great story of our time. The first two were “Business as Usual” and “The Great Unraveling.” But here giving and sharing and building community, is what she calls, “The Great Turning.” Everyone knew that “Business as Usual” was not working but here, gathered with Jesus they also discovered that “The Great Unraveling” was not the last word. They saw in Jesus the emergence of a new and creative response to an unraveling world. A response that gives and shares and heals and brings together, a response that is life-sustaining and full of hope.

I think some of that crowd that day, caught a glimpse of the Great Turning in Jesus. Not everyone but some saw that here was something new that brought hope and healing and renewal. Do you?

It is interesting that immediately after all this. Immediately after gathering up the leftovers and helping everyone, Jesus looks around and sees how tired Austin Heights is. He says, “Yall get in the boat and go across the lake to the other side. Get some rest. Take a couple of days off, prop up your feet up, and I’ll come over later and join you.” So, Austin Heights wearily gets in the boat to head for a little vacation time. And Matthew says the next thing you know a big storm came up.

It's always something.

But God in Christ comes to us, is with us, and gives us more than enough. Come! Enjoy! There is plenty!

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