

Matthew 14:13-21

## Compassion

When you hear the stories of Jesus do you consider his emotions? Or is Jesus just a character in a story for you who doesn't have much to offer by way of his emotions?

Today's reading begins with, "Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself." (v13) What Jesus had heard was that the man who was a prophet before him, the one who had baptized Jesus, John the Baptizer, had been beheaded at the request of a dancing girl with a spiteful mother and an acquiescent ruler. So, when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from Nazareth, his hometown, where he had also been rejected, because who would listen to a carpenter's son anyway when it came to things of learning regarding God? (Matthew 13:54-58)

Jesus was grieving. Who wouldn't be hurting when those you know and love don't accept you for who you are? When people take offense at you? Then the next thing you have to deal with is the death of someone you care about, someone you have a connection with. Jesus was fully human while being at the same time fully God's son. Being fully human meant and means that he had emotions. Jesus could be hurt. He could grieve. It is in part why we can trust Jesus with all that we bring to him. He gets it, and because of that, we can trust that God gets it.

In the story, Jesus goes away from everyone to be by himself, to work through the emotions but more so to be with God. He went to a deserted place. It was his practice to go and pray. But, by this time in Jesus' ministry, the crowds have heard too much, maybe seen too much and they follow Jesus on foot from the towns. Jesus saw the great crowd. He saw their brokenness and he had compassion for them. Jesus had compassion for them. With all that he was dealing with he could see the need of others and turned to healing their sick.

Rejection, grief, compassion. Jesus felt things. All this is to say that if you only understand God to be judgmental and angry, unchangeable and aloof, then you need to spend some time with Jesus. Jesus is God with us. God made flesh, and Jesus knew pain, loss, hurt, and loved people anyway – had compassion for all within the great crowd that was before him that day.

The people have hung around so long that the dinner hour is fast approaching and likely people's bellies are beginning to rumble, that is if they were not hungry already. This was a crowd of people who would not have known abundance when it comes to food. It is difficult for many of us to understand true hunger. We get a little rumble in our tummy and we can reach for food or go through a drive thru. Food is as available to us whenever we want it. We eat until we are full most every day. On the other hand, this

was a people whose pantries would not be overflowing, there was no restaurant nearby and even if there had been they would not have been able to afford to eat there.

The disciples realizing the situation strongly suggest, maybe even command Jesus to send the crowds away, as there is no way there is enough among them to feed everyone. Even if others gave what they might have stashed in their pockets there was no way that, plus five loaves of bread and two fish, would go very far. Out in this deserted place there was no provision for this situation.

Jesus does not say to them, "You are right." Rather he says to the disciples, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." (v16) Then he takes the loaves and fish and orders the crowds to sit down on the grass. Not sure if everyone at the back could hear him or even see him. Some were likely just doing what everyone else was doing and wondering what was going on up there. Still, Jesus took the loaves and fishes and looking up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all at and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces." (v19-20).

I am not here to explain to you the one miracle that has been described in all four gospels. Each account with its own perspective. I cannot explain a miracle. What I can tell you is that Jesus worked with what was there. In a place that seemed devoid of resources, in Jesus...who looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples and the disciples gave them to the crowds...those present had enough. They had enough and there were leftovers.

There in a wilderness place, where food was scarce and the workers few, where the need appeared greater than could be addressed. Jesus made something happen. What you may have missed is that Jesus did not give them the miracle, he gave them blessed and broken food, and it was as the disciples moved through the crowd that somehow there was enough and more. The disciples played a role in this work. Jesus had said to them earlier, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." (v16) And he didn't waver from that.

It can make one wonder what is possible in our lives, in the life of the church. Just when we think we have given all we can, when there is nothing more to do, when we are ready to give up, that is when Jesus, when God, enters into the unexpected, into what seems to be a "not possible moment" and there is abundance. It may not be about physical food, though one cannot ignore the great cry and need for the basics of life by so many in our community, country and world. Feeding people, housing people, making sure that they have clothing is about human dignity and we are all called to participate in that.

God entering into the unexpected and seemingly impossible moments is about trust, faith, provision, and the compassion of a loving God who cares deeply for the wellbeing of all. Not just those who happen to have made a living for themselves, but God who

cares about the wellbeing of all so that all are filled, physically and emotionally, surrounded by caring and compassionate community.

This is about God's capacity, not our limitations. So often we are tempted to think that there is not enough, that we are not enough. When I was approached by the Interim-Moderator of St Andrew's back in 2013 about considering coming to this congregation, I thought to myself, I am not enough to take this on. This big building in the city's downtown core, with all that brings. A congregation that had only had male ministers and seasoned longstanding ministers at that. And here I was a new graduate who would be very different from what had been the legacy of this church. What did I have to offer? I felt very inadequate. A wise supervisor was working with me at the time at Sunnybrook Health Center and the day before I was to board the plane to do an interview here and preach at Lakeview on a Sunday morning so that the Search Committee could hear me, the supervisor looked at me and knowing my concerns said, "Joyce, you are enough."

Without those words going through my head throughout the process I don't believe I would have come to St. Andrew's here in Thunder Bay. This was not the ministry I thought I was equipped to do. Thing is, I came to realize and to know that this is God's ministry, not mine. I have my part to play, but each of you did and does too! Together we are called to God's work in the world.

It comes down to a few things, but one is discerning what can happen from God's perspective. We can never dream as big as God can do. Everything needed is present whether in the church or in our own lives. There is an abundance in the loaves and fish.

Though the crowd may not have truly comprehended what they were a part of...though the disciples may not have truly understood what was going on...all experienced abundance, they experienced Jesus' compassion and God's power.

Trust that what you have to offer is enough and when given in faith, whether it be time, energy, knowledge, talents, and more, God can take that, can take you, and particularly when brought together with the time, energy, knowledge, talents and more of what others offer, an abundance of care, compassion, resources and transformation can come from that.

I think of the hymn, Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so. This is one of the stories that tells of Jesus love and compassion who, as God made flesh, is the story of God's love and compassion.

May our lives reflect that love and compassion, along with offering what we have to give of ourselves and from our lives, so that God's abundance flows from us to the world. In the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.