

2 August Matthew 14.13-21 Dean Susanna

Imagine the scene, there was food galore, there was finery, there was dancing and diplomacy and deals done, and in the end, John's head on a platter, a Eucharist of sorts.

Jesus heard that his cousin had been murdered, needlessly, senselessly for a dancer and her mother, and to save face for Herod.

When Jesus heard about it, about his cousin's death, he withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself, to grieve, to think, he might be next.. to make sense of this senselessness.. then he heals and feeds. The juxtaposition couldn't be more ironic, or powerful. One moment Matthew invites us to focus on one more episode from the "lifestyles of the rich and shameless" and in the next he focuses our attention on a scene portraying poor, sick, and hungry crowds looking for relief... Starkly, Matthew points in these contrasting scenes to just what kind of God Jesus represents, in contrast to the God's of Rome.¹

So, now, we have a second feast, abundance, with bucketful's of left overs. Jesus took, blessed, broke, and shared. The reluctant disciples distributed the food, made it happen. The landscape was changed from scarcity to abundance from withholding to generosity. What a contrast.

Jesus had compassion – In his own suffering, his heart went out to them. He healed, he taught. He was present with them, all these people in need. He fed them and when evening came his followers wanted to send them home, get rid of them – ostensibly they too were being compassionate ' –the people need to go to get food'. The subtext ' –come on, it's time to pack up now, we're tired '... to disperse community rather than build it up.

'You give them something to eat 'says Jesus. What a challenge, a challenge he makes to us too. 'Us? We haven't got enough. We are overwhelmed with the numbers. We just can't – See five loaves of bread and two fish ... You are being unrealistic ...'

'Bring them to me 'he said. 'Bring them to me.' 'Here they are.'

Jesus took them Blessed Broke And Gave them to us to share – This is eucharist, this is communion.

Took, blessed, broke, gave ... and there was enough for everyone – more than enough.

Our tiny offering, in Jesus hands, is enough ...

So why do you hold back?

More than enough ...

I am embarrassed. It is only small. I am not good enough. I am too busy.

With your tiny offering

we will build a community,

we will care for those in need, we will grow.

'You give them something to eat.'

¹ <http://www.davidlose.net/2014/07/pentecost-8a-the-real-miracles/>

We offer what we have. Jesus takes what we have, who we are, blesses, breaks, gives and it is enough...

more than enough.

the character of the God Jesus reveals and represents is captured in a single word, "compassion." Matthew says that when Jesus saw the great crowd that had followed him he had compassion for them. And so he healed their sick, tended their needs, and shared with them his presence. And then, when evening came and they found themselves without food, he fed them.

Let me share poet, Andrew King's, AND PLENTY FOR THE PILGRIMAGE HOME reflecting on this story, and resonant in our Covid time:

He came ashore into crowds:

the crowds with little peace

the crowds with little joy

the crowds with little hope

with hurts unnumbered

to bring to his caring

in a place like desert

a place like emptiness

a place of the aching heart

and the hour became late

and the shadows lengthened

and hunger was deeply felt.

Where shall crowds go

in this hour like emptiness,

in this time of warring,

in the gathering shadows of despair?

Where shall we buy

the hope that strengthens,

the love that nourishes,

the peace we so desperately need?

See how our baskets feel nearly

empty,

how in our own hurting,

weariness and hunger

we believe we have little to give.

But hear, in the words

of the one who is kindness,

whose compassion reaches

beyond the setting sun,

the hope our hearts long for,

on which we can feed:

hear the invitation

to share even our weakness

for it contains the promise

that there is no emptiness

where the Source of all life

does not flow;

that there is no place where

death's shadows are falling

where the Redeemer of life

does not go.

We can feed upon that promise,

promise of sufficiency,

promise of despair overcome –

feed upon grace that is fullness of joy.

We can share, eat, and be full.

And there is plenty for the pilgrimage

home.²

² Andrew King

<https://earth2earth.wordpress.com/2014/07/27/poem-for-the-sunday-lectionary-pentecost-8/>

The real wonder of this story is that it continues: God still cares deeply and passionately for those who are most vulnerable – the poor, the refugee, the hungry – and God continues to use us to care for them³, even here, even today in the selfless generosity of many of you, in Wellington FoodBank, in making face masks, in sewing clothes for people in Vanuatu, in mowing the lawns, in visiting the sick, in repairing a tap or a screen door...

Liminality concert which came out of a desire to share Beauty with those affected by the fires so heart warming

Once upon a time, somewhere in post-war Eastern Europe, there was a great famine in which people jealously hoarded whatever food they could find, hiding it even from their friends and neighbours. One day a wandering soldier came into a village and began asking questions as if he planned to stay for the night.

There s not a bite to eat in the whole province”, he was told. Better keep moving on.”

Oh, I have everything I need”, he said. In fact, I was thinking of making some stone soup to share with all of you.” He pulled an iron cauldron from his wagon, filled it with water, and built a fire under it. Then, with great ceremony, he drew an ordinary-looking stone from a velvet bag and dropped it into the water.

By now, hearing the rumour of food, most of the villagers had come to the square or watched from their windows. As the soldier sniffed the broth” and licked his lips in anticipation, hunger began to overcome their scepticism.

Ahh”, the soldier said to himself rather loudly, I do like a tasty stone soup. Of course, stone soup with cabbage – that s hard to beat.”

Soon a villager approached hesitantly, holding a cabbage he d retrieved from its hiding place, and added it to the pot. Capital!” cried the soldier. You know, I once had stone soup with cabbage and a bit of salt beef as well, and it was fit for a king.” The village butcher managed to find some salt beef ... and so it went, through potatoes, onions, carrots, mushrooms, and so on, until there was indeed a delicious meal for all. The villages offered the soldier a great deal of money for the magic stone, but he refused to sell and travelled on the next day...

Susanna

³ <http://www.davidlose.net/2014/07/pentecost-8a-the-real-miracles/>