

Sermon for August 6, 2017 – “Remember”

18th Sunday in OT, Year A – Texts: 2 Kings 4:42-44; Matthew 14:13-21

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To fully understand our gospel reading this morning it's important to know its context. And to do that, we must know what happens just prior to the events that take place in our reading. The story that takes place immediately **before** our reading this morning also involves a meal, a very **different** sort of meal. One that ends up with John the Baptist's head on a platter. Herodias, King Herod's sister-in-law, asks for John's head. Her nameless daughter, with no detectable hint of squeamishness, delivers the request to the king who is bound by honor to agree. He has John killed and serves up the plated head to her mother. So, as our story opens, Jesus had just received the news that John was dead. Their families were close. Luke's gospel says that Jesus' mother Mary and John's mother Elizabeth were relatives. They'd gotten together when they were pregnant with them. John and Jesus were both servants of God, sent to preach the Good News. John had baptized Jesus. And, now John was gone, beheaded, Murdered. Jesus' reaction is one that anyone might have when we're faced with such awful news. He wants to retreat. He needs some time alone to process it, to grieve, to pray. But for Jesus, such was not to be. He couldn't get away. Someone must've seen where He'd gone and tipped the crowd off. They followed. Maybe they didn't know what'd happened. Maybe they hadn't yet gotten the news. Maybe they didn't realize how deeply the news had affected Jesus. Maybe they thought it wouldn't faze such a wise, godly man like Him. Maybe they just didn't care. Something tells me though that they were simply oblivious. All they could see were their own needs. All they could feel was their own pain.

Matthew doesn't give us all the details here, but I've a feeling that last one is the closest to the truth. That the crowd was simply unaware. I say that because when I'm going through difficult times it's hard to see past whatever's going on in our lives. It's hard to notice that others might be going through a rough patch too. All I can do is see the hurt that's inside of me. But, that's not how Jesus operates. He could've sent them away. He could've told them all what had happened to John. He could've gotten into the boat, conjured up a good storm and been done with them all. But, Jesus was moved with compassion. He always is. Jesus was able to see beyond His own pain and feel theirs. And so, He healed them. And when He was done healing them, He fed them. I'm not sure if there's a passage that better shows the humanity and divinity of Jesus as beautifully as the one in our gospel reading. It shows Jesus mourning and grieving, yet offering healing and life at the same time. Like manna from heaven, day by day, He is always enough. How, we might ask, does He do it?

But there's more here. It's found in Jesus words **“you give them something to eat.”** These words are directed to His disciples and they're directed to us as well. Whether Jesus is testing them or whether grief has simply caught up with Him isn't clear. What **is** clear is that He says to them: you do this. Whatever this is, I'd say that this is less about Jesus than it is about **us**. You see, it's not a question of whether Jesus is – or isn't – able to do this. Certainly, He **can**. The disciples know this. **We** know this. But the idea of feeding all these people themselves doesn't even enter the disciples' minds. Nevertheless, Jesus asks them to do this. “You give them something to eat,” He tells them. Their response? **“We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.”**

They must have thought Jesus was crazy. They were probably thinking: “Us? “Feed them?” “Seriously?!?” “Do you see how many people are sitting there? “There’s over 5,000 people here and all we have are five loaves and two fish we got off some kid!” And what does Jesus say? **“Bring them here to me.”** The rest is history. The truth is that the lesson here is simple. We’re to feed one another. We’re to feed one another regardless of the situation or circumstances we find ourselves in, regardless of our perceived ability to do so, whether we think we’re able to do so or not.

To illustrate, let me tell you this story. Once there were two brothers who inherited their father’s land. The brothers divided the land in half and each farmed his own section. Over time, the older brother married and had six children while the younger brother never married. One night, the younger brother lay awake. “It’s not fair that each of us has half the land to farm” he thought. My brother has six children to feed and I have none. “He should have more grain than I do.” So, that night the younger brother went to his silo and gathered a large bundle of wheat. He then climbed the hill that separated the two farms and walked over to his brother’s farm leaving the wheat in his brother’s silo. The younger brother returned to his home feeling very pleased with himself. Earlier that very same night, the older brother was also lying awake. “It’s not fair that each of us has half the land to farm,” he thought. “In my old age, my wife and I will have our grown children to take care of us, not to mention grandchildren, while my brother will probably have none.” “He should at least sell more grain from the fields now so he can provide for himself with dignity in his old age.” So, that night, he too secretly gathered a large bundle of wheat, climbed the hill and left it in his brother’s silo...Like his brother, he too returned home feeling very pleased with himself. The next morning, the younger brother was surprised to see the amount of grain in his barn unchanged. “I must not have taken as much wheat as I thought,” he said, bemused. “Tonight, I’ll be sure to take more.” At that very same moment, his older brother was standing in his barn thinking the very same thing. After night fell, each brother gathered a greater amount of wheat from his barn and in the dark secretly delivered it to his brother’s barn. The next morning, the brothers were again puzzled and perplexed. “How can I be mistaken?” each one said to himself, scratching his head in bewilderment. “There’s the same amount of grain here as there was before I cleared the pile for my brother. “This is impossible! He thinks for a moment. Then says “tonight I’ll make no mistake. I’ll take the entire pile down to the very floor, that way I’ll be sure the grain gets delivered to my brother.” The third night, more determined than ever, each brother gathered a large pile of wheat from his barn and loaded it onto a cart. Each brother slowly pulled his haul through the fields and up the hill to the other brother’s barn. At the top of the hill, under the shadow of a moon, each brother noticed a figure in the distance. Who could it be? When the two brothers recognized the form of the other brother and the load he was pulling behind they realized what had happened. Without a word, they dropped the ropes to their carts and they embraced!

So, it would seem then, as we stand in the disciples’ shoes, that we too are to obey Jesus’ daring, ridiculous command to feed people. We too are to offer our seemingly limited resources to Him to bless and multiply them, and take responsibility for them. We’re not to hoard them for ourselves but distribute them to others. These resources could be money and possessions, but they could also include things like time, energy, innate abilities, and acquired skills. I mentioned at the outset that this account of the feeding of the multitude is recorded in each of the four gospels. It’s recorded for future generations Why? Because, like previous generations, we need to hear it too. In fact, we need to hear it over and over and over again! And why is that? Well, because over and over and over again in life we find ourselves standing in the disciples’ shoes in this passage.

We're surrounded by human need. We're faced with a seemingly insurmountable, impossible, challenge. We know we don't have the resources, that is, we don't have the knowledge, the wealth, the strength, the ability, the whatever, to meet the need, to stand up to the challenge. Oh, yeah, we're a lot like the disciples. We say, "we're in the middle of nowhere and it's late and we don't have enough of whatever it is we have..." We feel our only option is to sit back and try not to see the needs. Try to ignore the challenge hoping maybe it'll go away, or that someone else will do it. That seems to be our default position. We might say that Jesus was only trying to teach His disciples a lesson in that particular time and place; that these words aren't meant for us here and now. Or, that we've already done enough over the years for the church, that it's time for someone else to step up. Why? Well, maybe because we don't think we have what it takes to respond...Or maybe because we think that we no **longer** have what it takes...Or maybe we think that that the problem is so big, so insurmountable, that we couldn't possibly make a difference. And so, we'd rather **not** respond to the call than fail to meet the need! What, we say to ourselves, will others think if we fail? But don't we Christians think about things like success and failure differently? I think we're supposed to, aren't we? There's a line in the movie "Schindler's List" taken from Jewish writings collected in the Talmud. The line is "whoever saves one life saves the world entire."

One person can make a difference. Even if, as we learned a few weeks ago, it's only to plant a seed in the hearts and minds of others. So, it seems to that if nothing else this story should inspire us. It should motivate us to get up out of our comfortable chairs and throw ourselves into offering our resources to a needy world. Whatever we have even if we don't think it's enough. First, because we probably have more than we realize! Second, because when it's placed in Jesus' hands it will always be more than enough! We forget that all that's required of us is to give what we **have** and that, I think, is our greatest failing as human beings; That we forget! Thank God for the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion. There we gather around Christ's table. There we're called to give thanks and remember. We're to stand in the story looking backward, back to the story of manna in the wilderness. The story of the ancient Israelites newly escaped from slavery in Egypt, hungry, feeling the pain of hunger in the pit of their stomachs, taking refuge in fantasizing about their meals in Egypt. Witnessing a miracle as God provides manna, quail, water. Nourishment in the desert.

Turning a few pages, we find the story of Elisha in our first reading. Standing with the man from Baal-shalishah, watching as he brings his first fruits to God. Watching as his meager resources feed a hundred people. Turning a few more pages, we find the story told in our gospel reading standing among the 5,000 who have come to hear Jesus, following Him late in the day to a deserted place; Hungry. Hungry for His Word, Hungry for healing and wholeness, Hungry for bread. Watching as He takes bread; five loaves. Blessing them, Breaking them, Giving it to His disciples, Witnessing a miracle! Moving still deeper into the story. We find the story of the Last Supper. Jesus again taking bread, Blessing it, Breaking it, Giving it to others. In doing so, looking back to the first Passover, the liberation of God's people from slavery in Egypt. While, at the same time, looking ahead to His Passion. His own body broken and given for others.

Turning more pages we find ourselves in the present. Preparing to gather around the Lord's Table, remembering His sacrifice while awaiting His return. Remembering what is past and what is yet to come, what He has already begun! And it's in this place we're to stand, between what is past and what is yet to come, between the stories of God's providence in ages past and the promise of the heavenly banquet to come.

In anticipation of the full expression of God's Kingdom on earth! Brothers and sisters, here's the thing, it's not easy to take Jesus' command to feed people to heart. It's tough to trust enough to offer our resources, limited as they sometimes are, for him to bless, break, and distribute. Yet that's exactly what this story's telling us that we must do. Ever wonder why there are so many stories of people being fed in the Bible? Why stories of Jesus feeding thousands are told five times in four gospels, two in Matthew? Well, now you do. We must remember what Christ has done, and be reminded of what we **can** and **must** do. Right here. Right now.

Thanks be to God.

Amen and amen.