

Denice Leslie
August 3, 2008
12th Sunday after Pentecost
Matthew 14: 13 – 21
Communion Sunday

Jesus Is Enough



Standing for the first time on American soil at the mouth of the St. Lawrence River, my Scottish Immigrant grandparents, were famished. They'd spent the last two months crossing the Atlantic Ocean, boarding below the water line in a small cabin.

Debarking from the ship began early and now it was well past lunch time. The mouth watering smells of food vendors on the harbor wharf drew their hunger.

They walked over to the nearest stall where hot dogs were being sold. They had no idea what a hot dog was, but the smell was so mouthwatering they ordered one—all their meager funds would permit, and shared it up until the last bite which dropped into the dust of the street. My grandmother recalls my grandfather restraining her from bending over and picking it up, saying, "It was good and it was enough!"

Enough. Do we ever have enough? We operate out of a sense of constant scarcity. Indeed—if I recall my Economics text book our economic system is built on the concept of the distribution of scarce resources. So we operate from a sense of constant scarcity.

The people of Jesus' day did as well. They were taught not to co-mingle with the unclean, and to observe strict religious dietary laws to avoid unclean foods. Consequently, unclean people and unclean food restrictions resulted in some in the crowd listening to Jesus' teach in a very remote place with plenty for themselves and others without. These folks operated from a sense of scarcity: that is a sense of those *who have* deserve AND *those who don't have*, don't deserve. They aren't favored by God and therefore by us.

Too often in our society's promotion of the self-made rugged individual as the ideal, we operate with much the same attitude: *we who have* are the clean, God approved folk. Those without are the unclean—un- approved by God-- and therefore by us-- folk.

So we naturally keep our distance: our hard work, our lawful gains, and reverence for God insulating us from the very world God sacrificed to save.

Our plenty is a remote place. A place of scarcity. We fail to remember that we can trust God to provide for us with enough for ourselves and for others. In the process we deny ourselves and others the very thing God desires among us: all God's children gathered at the same table—a place for everyone—community and a distribution of what is needed communally—so that no one is left out and all are included in God's abundance.

We forget in our favored place of plenty that Jesus comes to seek and save the lost—and there are certainly all kinds of remote or wilderness places biblically and spiritually and literally in which we are lost. But we are not called out by Jesus to remain among the lost. We are found and for a purpose like the children of Israel--but we in each new generation need to learn their lessons.

Israel followed Moses into the wilderness and ran out of food and felt lost, alone and vulnerable—famished. Crying out to Moses they complained, "Did God bring us out here to starve us to death? At least in Egypt we had flesh in our pots to eat!"



What happened? God provided: Manna each morning at sunrise. Do you remember the instructions God gave Moses for the people about how to collect the manna? The instructions were to eat as much as they needed when it appeared on the ground each morning but not to collect and try to hoard it.

When the sun rose the manna disappeared. But each day it was renewed. However, some of the Israelites ignored the instructions Moses gave them. And what happened? The manna they collected was full of maggots by mid-afternoon. The children of Israel learned to trust in God's provision and to accept that it was and would continue to be enough.

Speaking of wilderness places in our lives, what brings Jesus out in a boat to this remote place along the shores of the Galilee?

Our gospel lesson begins, "Now when Jesus heard this he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place...." What did he hear?



Jesus withdrew to this spot on hearing Herod threw himself a big birthday party, with an extravagance of food and entertainment that culminated in the serving up of the head of John the Baptist on a plate. This banquet of Herod's is a meal of worldly power, extravagant waste, fear, hate and violence in an opulent palace where there are gates and security to keep out the un-desirables and protect those within. A place of plenty with a scarcity of human kindness, compassion and community.

The meal in the wilderness, where the riff raff, the sick and the needy have persistently sought Jesus out is very different. It lacks all the comforts and plenty and opulence of Herod's party but provides so very much more!

Jesus has come to this out of the way place to grieve. But on seeing the people, scripture says, "his heart went out to them" and he proceeds to heal their sick and then spends the day teaching them.

It is shocking but unnervingly insightful to know that the expression "his heart went out to them" is the literal translation of the Greek for the word compassion which is based in the fact that originally in religious liturgical acts of human sacrifice it literally meant the actual ripping out of the victim's heart. Shades of Indiana Jones!

But redemption is what God is about. So what was once a violence becomes through Jesus a depth of God's mercy and self-less loving kindness—a giving of God's very own heart for our sakes by taking our misguided notions, our death dealing ways and turning them in to life giving ways, turning our attitude of scarcity into a recognition of God's abundance.

Turning our fearfulness of others different from ourselves into hospitality.

Yes, the meal Jesus provides the 5,000 is about all of this: God's loving kindness and depth of mercy providing us with an abundance of manna in the wilderness of our spiritual poverty, our lostness of misguided notions about who is deserving and who is not. Who God favors and who God rejects. How much we have and how much we need. Overcoming our sense of scarcity: our fear that there isn't enough of God's love to go around, that there isn't enough food in the world for everyone and so we have and that means others don't and won't—too bad, so sad! Just the facts of life.

Its not that we as Christians don't have compassion for the hungry and the needy. We do! Just as the first disciples demonstrate—our hearts go out to them--but our dilemma, just like theirs is because we operate out of an attitude of scarcity we don't believe we have what we need to do the job. But Jesus doesn't accept that.

Late in the day, the disciples come to Jesus and say, "Lord, it is getting late and the people are hungry. Dismiss them so they may go into the villages and buy something to eat." We are taken aback by what Jesus tells them, "They don't need to go anywhere. YOU give them something to eat."

We tell Jesus what? We tell him we just don't have enough! There's never enough money, time, people or energy! "Lord, we only have a few loaves and a couple of fish. Jesus, however, says bring what you have to me. And then he does the seemingly impossible. He takes our scarcity, our little bit of fish and bread and gives back enough to not only feed a multitude but with leftovers to boot! The gospel says 5,000 men—but remember that means there were women and children as well—making this the feeding of the 10,000 or 20,000!

The message: What we do have is Jesus. And JESUS IS ENOUGH. Because Jesus keeps on giving, and giving and giving, and giving.....and we can rely on him to keep on giving.

"A pastor was used to giving out crumbs until one Sunday when a little girl about 3 years

old came to the front of the sanctuary with her mom to receive Communion. The pastor knelt down beside her and said, "This bread means that Jesus loves you very much" and gave her a little piece of the loaf which she promptly wolfed down. Instead of moving down the line, she held out her hands in the way that she'd seen the people before her do, looked at the pastor with hopeful eyes and said, "More?"

More. With Jesus there's always more — more grace, more love, more room, more of everything. God takes the smallest that we can offer and multiplies it into more than we can fathom. We need to be able to ditch the diet of scarcity and enjoy the bigger hunk of grace God offers us.



We can look at the world around us, a world needing to be fed physically and spiritually, and immediately begin to worry about our assets. Jesus, however, is calling us to look beyond the logistical problems of addition and think multiplication.

The hungry multitudes — people hungry for their next meal, hungry for God, hungry for grace, hungry for a chance to change their lives.

When Jesus says to us, "You give them something to eat,"¹ we can do so remembering that in Jesus God provides manna every new morning and we can count on God's Jesus-manna for each and every day of our lives!

Let the people say, Amen!

¹ Homiletics, 8/3/08