

SERMON

MATTHEW 14: 13-21

GENESIS: 25:

Psalms 145

Romans 9:1-5

Bless, Break, and Give

This is a most amazing story of Jesus. It is one of the only stories repeated in almost the same words in all four gospels. It was probably originally in Mark 6:32-44 and Matthew, where we read it today, then Luke 9:10-17, John 6:1-13. The original people to whom this story spoke lived in very different times from each other, primarily leading up to and then after the destruction of the Judean people, their temple, their population, and their confidence in life itself. It is, still, for all people, even us today, a meaningful and important lesson from Jesus.

In this Matthew reading, it begins, “Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself.”

Jesus had just heard that his dear cousin, lifelong friend, personal baptizer, and colleague in ministry, John the Baptist, has been murdered - beheaded - by Herod.

Can you imagine how Jesus feels hearing this news? So sad ... shocked ... afraid for his own safety; perhaps he was angry ... maybe even furious ... “This has got to stop!” He takes off in a boat to be alone.

Is he allowed to be alone? Not for long because there is a group of people who are chasing him. Are they just strolling along, this crowd of at least 5,000 people? Are they running? Scrambling to intercept Jesus? What’s on their mind? They’ve probably heard the news of John. Are they afraid? Are they angry? Are they seeking revenge? Is this when they will convince Jesus to be the Messiah that they are looking for? Can they push him to be the Messiah King that will vanquish those violent, murderous Romans?

The bible doesn’t say that the disciples were on the water with Jesus, so perhaps they are in the crowd too? Imagine them frenziedly trying to catch up as the crowd rushes to cut Jesus off before he gets away from them in his boat.

Jesus meets the crowd.

And what is Jesus’s response? Does he jump back in the boat and run away? Tell them to leave him alone so he can rest? Does he try to calm them down? Does he deliver a particularly sparkling parable? Does he feel his horrible sadness and just sit down and cry?

JESUS, turns his focus away from what he needs; his mourning, his safety, his rest, and turns to the needs of the people. The Bible tells us, “He cured their sick.”

This is a story of human pain, of human fear, of human need, and of human struggle like that of Joshua’s in our Genesis reading, as he struggled with God, and the ultimate blessing he received. It is a story of the power of compassion, the power of God’s blessing to meet, even exceed the needs of humanity.

It is also about abundance and generosity and its relationship to honour and shame. Today I would like Jesus’ gift of how to be generous.

First of all, evidently, the message from Jesus is, **“There is enough for everybody”**. Jesus turned five loaves of bread and two fish into meals for at least 5,000 people (we don’t really know if women and children were in the crowd, but if they were, they wouldn’t have been counted ... so at least 5,000 men) By any count, a large number of people. **There is enough. THERE IS ABUNDANCE, Jesus claims.**

Whose job is it to make sure everybody gets what they need? Jesus says to the disciples, **“They need not go away; you give them something to eat.”**(Matthew 14:16)

We can hear this day, **There is enough for everybody We need to make sure everybody gets what they need.**

This demand of Christianity from Jesus often sends people running ... “not my stuff” ... “not my money”!

It might help if we explore the notions of honour and shame and their relationship to abundance and generosity, as Jesus explains.

The struggle around ‘honour and shame’ is a well documented cultural phenomenon of the first century middle east. Honour was highly valued and in finite supply, so if you wanted it .. and it was very advantageous to have it ... you had to take it from someone. You had to battle them for it. It is said to be foundational in the relationships of the time, and the source of a great many skirmishes.

The condition of shame was ever so far reaching. Not having status in community was a condition for shame; not having enough to eat was a condition of shame; or not having money to buy sacrifices to atone for your sins was a source of shame; not being able to take care for yourself was a source of shame, so being ill, or disabled, or unclean, was a source of shame.

Shame, as a condition of humanity goes all the way back to Adam and Eve when they were tossed out of the Garden of Eden. After having eaten from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they saw that they were naked and felt the need to cover up (Genesis 3:7). They began to judge for themselves what was good and bad. This, then, is the foundation of shame. Humanity deciding on and covering up what we feel is bad.

Honour, on the other hand comes to us from God. You may remember back on January 29 of this year, Bob Bond spoke to us of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5). It was in this talk that he reminded us that Jesus knew that honour, ever flowing, for all people and for all time, comes from God. The Kingdom of God is full of honour, not to be competed for from other people, but available for all for the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger, those who are merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers.

Shame is a presence of inadequacy and greed while and Honour is the presence of abundance and generosity.

Shame is the creation of a frightened humanity. Honour is a gift from God.

Shame creates greed while honour creates a generous spirit.

The disciples came to Jesus, knowing three shameful things... the people were hungry, they didn’t appear to have any food, and the disciples had ‘nothing’ but five loaves and two fishes. SHAME

Whatever shame was laying on the people that day, and there was plenty, Jesus overturned it, replacing it with the honour from God.

Taking the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.

We, today, are still in an honour and shame culture ... we just don't talk about it as readily as the first century people did.

Even today, being able to take care of ourselves is seen as more honourable than needing to resort to receiving charity; having resources ... money, family, a good education ... is seen as more honourable than being poor, alone and not very smart; having authority is seen as more honourable than having to take orders all your life; having a good job, or better yet, a career, is seen as more honourable than working at a low paying job – we even call this 'menial' labour.

We don't really know how Jesus fed so many people that day. Maybe Jesus actually produced food for a crowd. Singers know that when everyone is in tune, you produce another note, a "harmonic" that no one is actually singing. Maybe Jesus was so in tune with God that his love, in harmony with God's, produced a new thing that wasn't there before. Or maybe people were so moved by the holy spirit that they shared what they had. We just don't know, but we do know what Jesus told us to do.

To be generous, bless, break, and give.

BLESS: The blessing that day, and every day, is for each of us to acknowledge that all we have is from God. Jesus' blessing does not change the bread, it changes us.

BREAK: What we have been given is given to us to help others in God's world. Break off what you can to

GIVE: Pass along to the need that you see. Pass it in the spirit of honor. You are not reducing shame ... you are increasing honour.

EXERCISE

I would like to invite us to practice what Jesus asked us to do. A short spiritual practice of honour and generosity. If you choose to participate, we will practice this at the time in our worship of God when we practice generosity, our time of offering.

Jesus told us, "You give them something to eat"

We can actually PRACTICE to Bless, Break, and Give.

You each have a small piece of paper with these instructions:

1. See what someone needs

someone you know now, someone you have known in the past, a stranger you have seen,

2. See if you have some of what they need

(smile, hug, greeting, encouragement, money ...)

3. Acknowledge that the ONLY REASON YOU HAVE THAT thing is that yours is a gift from God

4. THANK GOD FOR what GOD HAS GIVEN YOU

4. Break off a piece of what God has given

5. Give it to the person in need when you see them

WHAT I WILL GIVE

Once you have chosen what you would like to give this person, please jot it on the paper, fold it up and put it in the offering plate as our ushers pass it by. This is our time to practice GENEROSITY and we would love to collect all the gifts and bless all of them together.

Bless, break, give.

AMEN