

August 2nd, 2020

Isaiah 55: 1-5; Psalm 145: 8-9, 14-21; Romans 9: 1-5;

Matthew 14: 13-21

8th Sunday after Pentecost, a

As I studied the gospel for today, two themes kept emerging. I thought, uh oh, this is not good. As you probably know, preachers most usually preach on one theme and bring examples of it to help the listener understand the theme that comes from the reading of that particular Sunday. Two themes is not a good thing. But I did not want to drop either one of them. And sure enough, the Holy Spirit, said to my heart, "Here, here is how you can use them both and still come up with a sermon that is its usual length."

The first theme that occurred to me is the *persistence of Jesus* in our gospel story this morning. He was speaking to a great crowd and also touching them and healing them. It was getting later and later in the day. His disciples came to him and told him to send the crowd away. It was late and also the people were hungry and they had nothing to give them to eat.

Jesus said, "No, do not send them away. What do we have to eat?"

His disciples said, “we only have these five loaves and two fish.”

Jesus said, “Bring it to me.” And then, instead of telling the crowd to go away, he told the crowd to sit down.

The disciples brought the measly five loaves and two fish over to Jesus. He took the loaves and broke them and then blessed the loaves and the fish. He then gave the loaves and the fish to the disciples to distribute to the thousands of men, women and children, sitting there, waiting to hear more of what Jesus had to say.

We are told the people were “filled” to the point, that 12 baskets full were left over. The persistence of Jesus kept the people from leaving, but instead had them all sit down. He took what he had and made it what he needed, bringing into that crowd and sharing the love and compassion of God’s Kingdom.

The second theme that came to me from the gospel lesson was comparing the loaves and fish to what we have been given within ourselves and how it is used to build up and bring in God’s kingdom. Through our baptism we became children of God, disciples of Christ. Through our baptism, we have been given talent, we have been given gifts that can be used for the building up of God’s kingdom while we are here on this earth.

In the last few months, the gifts given to you have become so evident. We have people who can sew; they have used those talents to create quilts for people who have or are experiencing disasters where they are living. We have people who can cook. Food is being prepared in our kitchen and brought to a shelter housing men and women who cannot afford food. We have people who have a “green thumb”. The flower beds all around our building have been weeded and filled with flowering plants. No one has asked anyone to do this; it is just done. We have people who ask about some of our members who are home bound or about members who may be ill. They then send them a card and often times, give them a call. The Holy Spirit is using what has been given to us, little or large, to bring in God’s kingdom of love, mercy and grace.

The other day, I walked into the office and there was this 9-foot American flag on the conference table. One of our members found out we were needing to purchase another flag because the current one had been pretty badly ripped while hanging 24/7 over several months. That new 9-foot flag is hanging now, --although it is not new. It has been preserved in our member’s cedar chest, having been draped over her Dad’s coffin 50 years ago. The Spirit moves in ways we do not expect.

Just this week, we had someone who has been married for 36 years ago, drop off her wedding dress for our mission for the month of July, *Angels Wrapped In Love*. She also wrote a little prayer and placed it beside her dress. This mission provides burial clothes made from wedding dresses. The burial clothes are for premature and full born babies, who never make it home. *Angels Wrapped in Love* provides this service, so parents do not have to worry about going out and purchasing burial clothes for their baby.

There is a sense of persistence of Jesus in our being, brought by the Holy Spirit within us. We may think that we don't have anything to offer. Yet, because and through our baptism, there is a persistence, a nudging through the Holy Spirit, to participate in our own way, of bringing in God's kingdom into the world into which we have been placed.

The disciples of Jesus said, "It's late, send the crowd home. They're hungry and we have no food." Instead, Jesus immediately told the crowd to sit down, and had the disciples pass out to the crowd the loaves and fishes, showing everyone what the Kingdom of God is like. The Kingdom of God is a kingdom of mercy, compassion, kindness, love, forgiveness, thoughtfulness.

This is what Jesus, through the Holy Spirit does with us, just as he did with the loaves and fishes. He takes what we have and uses it to bring in and build up God's kingdom of goodness and mercy. We have no idea how what we may say or how something we may do, big or small, will be used by the Spirit to bring in God's kingdom.

I have mentioned this book before, Stranger God, Meeting Jesus in Disguise by Richard Beck. The essence of what Beck writes is simply to be kind to others, --all others, friends and enemies alike, people we like and people we don't like, people who are repulsive to us and people who are attractive. The author gives example after example of simple acts of courtesy and hospitality that takes little for us to do, but what can mean so much to another, all of which bringing into the world, God's Kingdom of mercy and kindness.

The persistence of Jesus through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within us, uses our own loaves and fishes, that is, uses what we have and what we are, to bring in God's Kingdom while we are here on this earth, God's kingdom of kindness, and respect, and love, God's Kingdom of thoughtfulness, forgiveness, and God's Kingdom of mercy, and compassion.

Amen,

Pastor Scales