

Abundantly Clear Abundance

[Text - Matthew 14:13-21]

Pastor Dave Shackle

August 6, 2017

In this morning's Continuing Testament, David Lose writes, "The point of Jesus feeding the 5,000 isn't *what* he does, but *why*. Matthew says that when Jesus saw the crowd...he had 'compassion' on them. So, in the name and power of God, he healed their sick, tended their needs, and shared his presence with them. Then, when evening came and they found themselves without food, Jesus fed them."

This story in *Matthew* begins with one of the low points of Jesus' life. Jesus receives word that his cousin and fellow-prophet, John the Baptist, has been beheaded by King Herod. Upon hearing this, Jesus and his disciples withdraw by boat to an undisclosed location. It's a place where they can get away from the hectic pace of their ministry, and take time to deal with their loss. Somehow, though, people quickly figure-out where they're headed. [Maybe Judas posted it on his *Facebook* page, the little snitch!] Regardless, by the time they arrive, a huge crowd has already gathered, seeking Jesus' care and attention.

I don't know about you, but at that point I'd have probably said, "Let's get back in the boat and try someplace else!" Fortunately, however, that's not Jesus' response. Instead, Jesus looks beyond his own pain and problems, and he *sees the people*. Not a large, faceless crowd; but the actual *people* in front of him - men, women, children - his sisters and brothers in need - each with his or her own problems and pain, stories and struggles, hopes and dreams. And because of his ability to truly *see* people, Jesus also has the capacity to genuinely *care* for them - and to take *action* on their behalf. In spite of his own pain and loss - or perhaps *because* of it - Jesus reaches-out and touches these people with a Divine peace and wholeness, compassion and grace. And apparently, in and through his ministry to *them*, Jesus finds his own strength and faith, hope and energy being renewed. This is an important point for you and me to keep in mind. Sometimes, one of the best ways to work-through our own problems and pain, is by being sensitive and attentive to the pain and problems of those around us.

Finally, after a long day of ministering to others, Jesus' disciples figure it's time to call it quits.

They're tired and hungry; and they're worried that all those people around them are also getting tired and hungry. So they urge Jesus to "send the people away," so that they can buy some food in the surrounding villages. But Jesus has a different idea. He says to his disciples, "They need not go away - *you* give them something to eat." And with that request, the excuses begin: "You expect *us* to feed *them*? Come on, Jesus, there are only twelve of us, and there must be *thousands* of them - what can we do against such odds? We've only got five loaves of bread and two fish. To *buy* enough food for everyone would take a tremendous amount of money, which we don't have. And even if we did, there's not a kosher deli in sight! Besides, *we* didn't invite them to come here; they just showed-up! It's not our fault they didn't plan ahead; or that they have such large families; or that they're poor and lazy and just looking for free food and medical care!" [O.K., maybe they didn't say all that...but it does have a familiar ring to it.]

"What are we going to do about all these hungry people?" That's a question that's been seeking a solution throughout history; and it remains extremely urgent today. Since the end of World War II, the affliction that cripples and kills the most people each year is *hunger*. More lives are lost and debilitated because of malnutrition and starvation, than any other disease! And what makes this fact particularly deplorable, is that hunger isn't caused because of a lack of food on this earth. It's caused because of the way in which the world's food and resources are divided and distributed.

After the excuses finally die-down, and the disciples offer Jesus their loaves and fish, he gladly takes them, looks up to heaven, and gives thanks to God! He blesses those gifts, brakes them, and then gives them back to the disciples, so that *they* might feed the people. And after all the people eat and are satisfied, there remain twelve baskets of leftovers - one souvenir reminder for each disciple!

Every miracle attributed to Jesus, every "wonderful work" he performs, points to his unshakable belief - and trust - in the overflowing abundance of Divine love and provision for this entire world. And as this incident indicates, Jesus also recognizes that it is in and through *people* - himself, his disciples, those people in the crowds who gather around him - that the Holy One lives and works and accomplishes great things.

Mother Teresa said, "If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one!" That's an extremely

wise insight! If Jesus had waited for God to rain-down manna from heaven to feed those folk, God might have said, "Sorry Son, but that one's been done!" Similarly, you and I can't wait-around for a magical multiplication of food-stuff - and we so don't! Instead, we put our food-stuffs into the basket for the Brookside Hunger Centers; we partner with others and serve meals in Cleveland Churches; we contribute to Hunger Relief programs; we get involved with Anne & Doug, Victor and Mickey in their Cleveland Roots food ministry.

Essentially, you and I - like Jesus - begin to see the actual *people* in front of us - men, women, children - our sisters and brothers in need. Like Jesus, we also are moved by a Divine compassion. And like those first disciples, you and I place our resources, and ourselves, into Christ's loving and capable hands - to be renewed and refreshed, multiplied and abundantly blessed! And *this* is how those "wonderful works" continue, even today!