

Matthew 15:32-39

32 Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, 'I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way.' ³³The disciples said to him, 'Where are we to get enough bread in the desert to feed so great a crowd?' ³⁴Jesus asked them, 'How many loaves have you?' They said, 'Seven, and a few small fish.' ³⁵Then ordering the crowd to sit down on the ground, ³⁶he took the seven loaves and the fish; and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ³⁷And all of them ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. ³⁸Those who had eaten were four thousand men, besides women and children. ³⁹After sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.

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When I picture Jesus, the crowds are inevitable. Shepherds, angels, mysterious travelers from the East – and that is just for starters. Nearly the first thing the gospels report Jesus doing after his sojourn in the wilderness (where the devil kept him company for a time) is that Jesus begins to gather disciples. So to this ragged band of twelve (plus occasional, random hangers-on) the gospel accounts add soldiers and beggars; women of means and women of questionable reputation; tax collectors and Pharisees...crowds everywhere some of them large beyond counting.

Sure, the gospel writers do their best to give us a sense of the event – 5000 at one memorable occasion, and then this story – 4000...besides women and children.

During this time of isolation, the very idea of 4000 plus people clamouring together for food and attention seems reckless in the extreme. And I don't offer this particular story to draw your attention to what we are missing as we wait and worry and pray our way through this particular, global crisis. These 'feeding the masses' stories offer us something else our time of extreme self-examination.

The notion that seven loaves and a few small fish might feed what amounts to a fair sized town is at first dismissed by our 'modern, sensible minds.' Our bodies need certain things – calories not the least of these – and even the most stringent diet asks more of the pantry than what is on offer in Matthew 15. But the miracle is that "all ate and were filled; **and they took up the broken pieces left over; seven baskets full.**"

Lent 2020 – week three of a new kind of worship:

And all of them ate and were filled (Matthew 15:37) April 2, 2020

We are, like it or not, learning what it is to live lean and look for left-overs. We are forced - by an illness that we could not anticipate – to reinvent our social selves. We are eating differently, worshiping differently, learning, teaching, working and playing differently, and in the process we might learn something about what matters and what is essential and what is not. Athlete heroes have been replaced by folks in scrubs or grocery store aprons. Politicians, suddenly aware that they cannot hope to have all the answers, are sharing the airwaves with medical experts. Mental health is once again a universal consideration. And the notion of presence – the ability to be with one another – has become precious and, dare I say, Holy.

Jesus' attitude towards crowds is a strange one. He does regularly seek solitude, for all kinds of reasons, but when he sees crowds, he acts with compassion. He arranges for their teaching and nourishment. And there is always enough to spare.

I pray that you might find abundance in these strange and challenging times. An abundance of peace that assures you – of grace to sustain you – of the love of God to give you hope.

Amen

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A prayer for the week:

O God who feeds multitudes and calms the raging sea,

Bring peace and joy and hope to us in new and delightful ways.

Show us your abundance in our time of need; show us your compassion in the midst of our anxiety.

By your Spirit – through your Son –help us make sense of our lives and our times

That we may yet give you glory in all things.

Amen

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Be assured of the Peace that God has promised, which is yours now and always through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen