

Matthew 14:13-21 Sunday August 2, 2020 Pastor Donna Alm

Merciful Lord, with great compassion you heal the sick and you feed the multitudes who come to you, there is always enough, not just for a taste but enough to satisfy, enough left over for those who have not yet tasted your goodness, your glory. You bid us to come to you, all who thirst, all who hunger; you bid us to come to the only thing that can be received without a price. Lord help us to heed your call to come, in Jesus name we pray, Amen!

Jesus, the teacher of parables in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew is now Jesus the provider and healer of all who come to Him. Evil in our generation has set its sights on those who hunger and thirst, those who long for that empty place within them to be filled up and satisfied! It constantly bids us to come and taste the forbidden fruits, it promises just like that serpent in the Garden of Eden, that if we just put aside the notion that it is not good for us and if we just reach out past our conscience and have a little taste, well then, power is ours, fullness is ours, satisfaction is ours.

But the reality is, it isn't just this generation is it that has had the apple of temptation wagged in their faces. This is from the very beginning our greatest downfall, wanting to fill up the empty place within us so that we might experience a sense of power, a sense of fullness, a sense of satisfaction.

If we just had, and each of us can fill in that blank _____! If we just had a little more money in our savings, if we just had a closet full of the newest clothes, if we just had that second vehicle, if we just had another child, if we just had more time for our families, if we just had a better position at our company, if we just had a few more quarters of land, if we just had a pivot to irrigate our crops, if we just had a better education, if we just had a healthy body & mind – the list is endless, our deceiving hearts assuring us that then, then we would be satisfied.

The empty places though that are filled with the things of this world, don't stay full long, do they? We just get that promotion at work and we are off to sell our simple home, mortgaging ourselves to the moon and back in order to have that home that speaks to our new status at work. Can't live in a shack when you work in the Penthouse right?

We assure ourselves that this must be true, yet there is no end to the filling and then the emptying and then the filling and then the emptying and then the filling and then the emptying! It is a constant battle to be full, but when it is just sugar going in, pretty soon the old blood sugars begin to battle, “I’m full, no I’m hungry, I’m full, NO I AM HUNGRY!!!!”

In our gospel lesson this morning, we read that Jesus could not find a moment of solitude, whether he was fleeing a crazy man, King Herod or whether Jesus was just needing time to mourn the loss of John the Baptist, his cousin by birth. The hunger of these people was fierce, five thousand men and then the woman and children besides, following him on foot from the towns! This man Jesus had what they needed; He was healing all of their infirmities, He was casting out all of their demons, He was filling up the empty places full to overflowing.

But this morning we read that just when their hunger was at its peak, the disciples shatter the moment with their demand to Jesus *“Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.”*¹ Matthew 14:15b Send them away, you’ve done enough Jesus, send them away!

Jesus, however, would take pity on a people in need, in the midst of His own needs! For the King of Kings, for the One who came to save the unworthy, you and I, there were no limits to His unfailing love, no saturation point whereby He would dismiss the needs of those seeking to fill up their empty places! And yet the disciples, if we are honest with ourselves, often wished to dismiss those who were seeking to fill up their empty places in Jesus.

Jesus’ weariness wasn’t reason enough to cast aside the sick and the hungry! Jesus at His lowest sets out to teach love at its highest. His disciples were about to learn from the actions of Christ more than any lecture could ever teach!

We can sit back and imagine the lesson Christ taught was just for His closest disciples, but if we have felt His love, truly felt Christ’s love fill up the empty places in us, if we have believed in God’s one and only Son as our Saviour and Lord then our

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations in this sermon will be taken from *The New International Version Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2008).

understandings must preclude us also from ‘Sending them away...’ whoever they might be!

In the book of Isaiah nearing the end, the Lord is calling us in our first lesson this morning to ‘Come fill up the empty places’, *“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost... Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good.”* Isaiah 55:1 – 2

The Lord is speaking to a people who should have understood the compassion of the Lord to provide for all their needs; the Israelites had walked with God, they had seen His mighty hand stretch out over the waters allowing them to escape the Egyptians on dry ground. They had been fed manna from heaven, water from a rock; they had received the Promised Land in all of its fullness and watched nations fall before them. But their rebellion, justifying their bad behaviour by simply going through the motions of their religion of sacrifice, gave way to God’s truth telling, through the prophet Isaiah.

Listen to the words of the Lord to a wayward people, a people who had been given all the things of this world and yet were still never satisfied!

Isaiah records the Lord’s dismay, His people who were simply going through the motions of religion without ever getting their hands dirty, without ever giving as they had been given:

“Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’ “Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.” Isaiah 58:3-9

In our passage this morning Jesus is calling us to reach out and take what little we may have, even when we feel spent, even when we would just like to escape and find that place of solitude where we can find rest for our souls or where we can mourn our losses, or where we can simply hide out from the evil that stalks us. We are called to be Jesus to a hurting world, therefore to not send them away but to take our pittance, lift it up with thanksgiving and break it apart in order that the blessings of God, the compassion of Christ Jesus, the One who truly fills our empty spaces once and for all, is received.

Let us pray: Lord, the reality is we will never feel like we have enough to share with the multitudes, we truly can relate to the disciples, yet Lord may we remember your command to give them something to eat. Evil stands ready with the forbidden fruit, that which spoils and rots. Father may we so willingly give to those in need the only food that lasts; the only food that fills, nourishes and sustains, Father may we so willingly give away the bounty of Christ Jesus that we have so freely received. Lord in your mercy...

Prayers:

With the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, let us pray for the church, those in need and all of God's creation.

Lord, let your blessings be poured out upon the priesthood of all believers, that the good news of your love may be proclaimed to the nations; to those who are feeling the effects of this pandemic crisis, missing the people they love, fearful for their own well being and the well being of others around them, those who are still isolated and feeling very alone. Help them to feel your presence with them and your love for them as they wait for relief to come. Lord in your mercy...

Lord, let your compassion guide us as a church to never send anyone away, but in great love to take our pittance, lift it up to you knowing that you will bless it to be all that is needed. Lord in your mercy...

Lord, let your healing hand rest on the sick, on the lonely, on the broken-hearted especially... that they might feel the gentle touch of your all-powerful love. Lord in your mercy...

Into your hands, gracious God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen