

Sermon – Matthew 14:13-21; Isaiah 55:1-5
David R. Lyle
Grace Lutheran Church
9 Pentecost – Year A
2 August 2020

“We Have Nothing”

Sisters and brothers, friends in Christ, grace be unto you and peace this day, in the name of God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. In a village where most blocks throw good block parties, our block's are the best. You might disagree, but only because you've never been to a party on 1100 Wenonah. After a COVID delay, we were finally able to gather yesterday. We played our annual all-ages kickball game, and Erika and I made our yearly appearance as the worst team in the Baggo tournament. But this year's party just wasn't the same. No bouncy house or dunk tank, no cake walk or beer tasting. One nice change was that the kids tie-dyed masks instead of t-shirts. But the biggest change came at mealtimes. Normally, breakfast is a potluck of casseroles and donuts and everything in between. And dinner is a collective feast; I, for one, spend most of the year looking forward to the chili. But not this year. One of the things that this pandemic has taken from us is the freedom to share food. We ate the morning meal in our own homes, and families made their own dinners, eating at tables six feet apart. Don't get me wrong; it was wonderful. It's just not the same when you only have what you bring instead of enjoying the food everyone has to offer.
2. What happens when people come to the gathering but bring no food, neither for themselves nor to share? Well, if Jesus' disciples had gotten their way, that's when the party would have ended. Our text today, after several weeks of parables, finds Jesus on Galilee's shore. The feeding of the thousands is the only miracle that appears in all four gospels. Today, instead of teaching us

about the Kingdom of God, Jesus *shows* us what it means. He incarnates the Kingdom in front of our eyes and in the midst of our emptiness. The disciples are ready to send the crowds away. It's dinner time and there's nothing to eat. The disciples say, simply, "We have nothing." What happens when our hands are empty?

3. Our emptiness, it turns out, is where Jesus does his best work. It is an emptiness he shares through the Incarnation. Jesus, every bit as human as us, is grief-stricken at the death of his cousin, John. Needing solitude, he seeks to get away from the crowds. The crowds, however, are empty, too; hungry for something more than bread. They follow him. Instead of sending them away, Jesus has mercy upon them. With his own heart broken open, he has compassion on them, healing their sick. For while Jesus is human, he is also God enfleshed, the One who spun forth the heavens with his creative Word. Emptiness is not a problem for Jesus, not even when the emptiness is within himself. Out of that void come life and healing. And next, food. A seaside feast for thousands bursting forth from a single picnic basket.
4. Therein is the disciples' first mistake. They mistake something for nothing. Sure, five loaves and two fish aren't much for a crowd, but they're not nothing. Jesus teaches them to see things differently: When he is present, what is not possible? Looking through the lens of scarcity, they can't even see what they have. But the Kingdom of heaven is like an itinerant preacher by the sea who takes the smallest meal and turns it into a feast for the multitudes. And that's the second mistake, forgetting that this Jesus who spoke of mustard seeds and buried treasure is the One who has come to bring in the Kingdom. With God, all things are possible. So, Jesus frees his disciples to feed the masses. While Jesus drives the miracle with a power beyond human capacity, he doesn't feed the people. The disciples do. The point is not that if we look deeply inside ourselves, we will discover that we are, that we have, enough. Nor is the point to sit back and wait for God to do

- God's thing. The point is that God, incarnate in Christ, can and does work miracles through us, because with God there is always enough. Grace upon grace with leftovers to spare.
5. We live in a hungry world. For many people, too many, this is a physical reality. 820 million people will go to bed hungry tonight. We might shrug our shoulders and say, "There's nothing I can do." Well, after I typed that sentence, I hopped online, went to ELCA World Hunger, and donated \$50. Not much more than five loaves and two fish, perhaps, but it only took me thirty seconds and all it cost me was money. God can do amazing things with gifts of any size. Since you're worshipping from home, feel free to hit the pause button and give a similar gift. We can work locally, give locally, too, through ministries such as Harmony Food Pantry, which continues to do great work for people in great need not far from our front doors. They've refused to let the pandemic slow them down. God's Kingdom is a potluck where all are welcome, and we are called to share our bread until everyone has eaten their fill. That's what God's love and compassion look like.
 6. There are other hungers, too, of course. We hunger for justice and peace; we thirst for equality and unity. The problems seem too big; we feel we have nothing to offer. Nonsense. We worship the God who fed the multitudes. Who are we to say that nothing can be done? A good place to start is by sitting at one another's dinner tables, sharing a meal as a means of sharing hope. I think back to a night three years ago. With an interfaith, multiracial group of American clergy, I had dinner one night in Nazareth. In an apartment with a view of the Church of the Annunciation, built on the site where the angel Gabriel told Mary that she would give birth to God, we broke bread with Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs. We listened as they spoke honestly about the years of conflict and with uncertain hope for a way forward. Nevertheless, we were all there, sharing food and searching for peace together. I left with a sense that while human brokenness isn't going away

any time soon, still there is a hope that is not just for the next world. After all, Mary gave birth to Jesus in *this* world, Jesus fed the crowds in *this* world, and *this* world is the one in which God will work through us. I left with hope, for if people who fear and distrust one another can share a meal together, next steps might be taken, too. Peace just might be found, from Israel and Palestine to our own communities.

7. We live in a hungry world, but we worship a God of abundance. Our call is to connect the one with the other. We cannot do it on our own any more than the disciples could have multiplied the loaves and fishes. But we need not do it on our own, for Christ has been born into our emptiness, our hunger, to feed us and fill this world with mercy and grace. Jesus entered so far into our emptiness that he died, bereft and forsaken. All hopes were dashed and there was nothing left. And God said, "I can work with that." The Kingdom that springs from the tomb with Jesus is a party, seen first in the meal of Holy Communion, a foretaste of the feast that will one day come. It is a world in which all are welcome at the table and no one stays hungry. Since you and I have a seat guaranteed at that table forever, why not practice for it now? Share your meals. Break bread with those who are different than you. Show the world what Christ has shown us: The kingdom of heaven is a party, and it's bursting into this world even now. Even though we arrive empty handed, there's plenty to go around, and there's always room to pull another seat up to the table. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.