

Matthew 14: 13- 21  
July 31, 2011

## Your Deepest Need

We've all been there. We've all been at a time and place in our lives when we just wanted to be alone---alone to try to make sense of things that have happened, alone to grieve and cry, alone to try to recover from an experience that was hurtful or traumatic or frightening.

It's hard to share our emotions with others sometimes. We don't always want others to know how we feel. Most of us don't like it when other people think we are weak or injured. I think maybe this is an instinct, surviving from a time when to be weak was to be easy prey to a larger, meat-eating animal.

We still face predators, after all, maybe not animals who want to eat us, but other people who will look for ways to exploit weakness, who will take advantage of us at times when we cannot defend ourselves...

Predators who will cheat us out of our money, who will damage our reputations, who will spread rumors about us that can hurt our careers or our relationships, or who will betray our trust and abandon us just when we think they care.

It can seem like the safest thing to do is to try to deal with the blows that life dishes out by ourselves, or maybe with just one or two really close friends.

In our Gospel reading this morning, the first words are, “When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.”

What had just happened to Jesus was that he had gotten the news that John the Baptist had been executed. John, his cousin, his colleague in ministry, the one who had baptized him, the one who had prepared the hearts and souls of people the good news----dead in a most gruesome way.

And so I think that Jesus wanted to be alone to grieve, to process the news, to pray to God. Maybe he was unsure that he was still doing what God wanted him to do. Maybe he wanted to make sure that his ministry wouldn't end the same way, too soon, without reaching all of the people he needed to reach.

Maybe he wanted to know if it was worth it to keep going on.

Or maybe, and I think PROBABLY, he just wanted to take a moment to grieve for a person who had been part of his life all of his life.

But he couldn't. The crowds followed him. And the disciples tried to find a way to convince the crowds to go away. I don't think they were being uncaring or selfish.

I think just maybe they were trying to take care of Jesus, and maybe themselves, too. After all, some of them had once been John the Baptist's disciples before being called by Jesus. So they were grieving too.

"Send the crowds away," they told Jesus. "Send them away to get something to eat in town." And that way, they could be alone with Jesus and grieve together, pray together, support each other.

And Jesus says, "No".

In the midst of his own grief, his own need, he demonstrates what he has said, that his own spiritual food and drink is to do the will of God.

In the midst of his own need, he turns his attention to the needs of others, to strengthening the community that is beginning to form around him, a community of people who may have indeed been hungry for bread and fish, but who were also hungry to hear the Good News, to learn about God, and to be in a deeper relationship with Jesus.

Last week I talked to you about some of the parables that Jesus told to teach people what the kingdom of heaven is like. This week we hear about Jesus bringing the kingdom closer in a very tangible way.

Feeding the 5000 was just a taste, a microcosm, of the Kingdom of God, where no one is hungry, where all God's children eat together, where there is enough for everyone and even some left over!

Jesus did not ignore the physical hunger of people. He fed them.

He did not overlook the physical needs for healing. He met them.

Jesus did not tell the people that everything would be fine in the sweet bye and bye. He made everything okay right then!

Now, we know that all prayers for physical healing are not answered by being cured, and not all hungry people are fed. The physical needs of people today quite often go unmet. And I think that some of those unmet needs are due to our failure to hear and obey Jesus when he says, "YOU give them something to eat."

Because even though this story is often referred to as “Jesus feeding the 5000,” the way that Matthew wrote down this incident shows Jesus blessing the food and giving it to the disciples, who then turn around and **THEY** are the ones who feed the 5000!

And I don’t want to tell you this morning to go feed the 5000---I’ve done quite enough of that lately.

What I want to say to you this morning is this----

I believe that the reason that too many of us too much of the time **DON’T** go out feeding the 5000 is this----

Because we haven’t let Jesus feed us yet.

We haven’t opened our hearts and our souls to the great gift of grace that Christ is offering to us, every day---every minute.

Either we don’t think we are worthy of that gift or we are too busy being self-sufficient, too busy being independent, too busy trying to be strong to open our hands and receive the Living Bread that Christ is offering---

The Bread that would fill up our souls to overflowing, leaving us enough to share with others.

Because the truth is that Christ stands ready to meet our deepest needs. Whether those needs are physical, emotional, or spiritual, Christ is with us, just waiting to meet us where we are.

There is no good reason to say no to Christ.

Nothing bad will happen if we accept that gift of grace and healing and forgiveness.

The reasons that we say no are based on fear, and Christ tells us over and over again not to be afraid. The angels said it, too, to the shepherds, to Mary and Joseph, to people throughout the Old Testament.

Fear not! Don't be afraid!

Perfect love casts out all fear!

And Christ is perfect love.

What is it that **you** need? Do you need to overcome a difficult past?

A past where you were hurt, where you were disappointed over and over?

A past where someone you trusted failed you?

A past where you were hungry or struggling? Maybe you have been abused or neglected.

Maybe someone has taken advantage of you, used you, exploited you.

Maybe there have been times when there was no good choice, and so you made the least terrible choice.

Maybe you made a bad decision that's led you down a bad path in life. Maybe you are alone, and maybe all you long for is someone to love you and care for you.

Christ stands close by, ready to meet your deepest need. Just stop and open your eyes and your heart.

I want you to sit quietly for a minute now. Search your heart. What is it you need, really need right now?

What kind of bread would fill that empty spot in your soul?

-----

Talk to Jesus about that need. Ask him what stands in the way of you letting him meet that need. Ask him to remove that obstacle, that barrier.

What does he say to you? Listen to his words. Does he pat your shoulder, hug you, hold you? Let Jesus take care of you.

-----

If you're not finished with your talk with Jesus yet, you can always go back to it later. Don't short-change yourself.

Don't deny Jesus the chance to meet your need. He can meet it, whatever it is. He can fill the empty place in your soul, and set you free from bondage to the past. He can take away your fear of the future.

Just let him in to that tender place. Open the door. That's all you have to do. He will do the rest.



And then, after you have been fed to overflowing, after you have been healed and loved and set free, then,

and only then,

You will be able to hear and respond when Christ says to you,  
“You give them something to eat.”

A person who is no longer hungry is more than willing to share.

Let us pray----