**Sharing the Abundance**

Isaiah 55:1-5  
Matthew 14:13-21

As a general rule, I am a believer in planning ahead and not leaving things until the last minute or just to chance when you have every opportunity to anticipate needs and be prepared. Our antiracism team has been sending emails back in forth this week making sure we have the supplies, the food and the people to host our French Toast Brunch following worship. There was a little anxiety, because Okogyeamon, whose recipe we are using remembered earlier in the week that he would be on the North Shore this weekend. Can we do this without the culinary expertise of Okogyeamon? You will have to come and find out, but I think you will be happy with the results. We have a number of talented chefs at Cherokee Park United. I was, however, glad to see those emails preparing for this morning’s brunch.

The Brunch itself is part of our preparation for hosting this year’s closing feast for the Pow Wow being held by the Mendota Mdewakanton Dakota community in mid September. We are truly honored to be given this opportunity to host the feast. Many of us are heartbroken at the continued site of Israel’s assault on Gaza with the resulting death of so many innocent adults and children. We wonder how it is possible that leaders allow this to continue?

Yet, our own history of treatment of the Dakota and Ojibwe people in Minnesota is no less shocking. The Mendota Mdewakanton community were among those Dakota known as the friendlies, because of their close proximity to Fort Snelling and their relationship with the soldiers and their families. Yet, when the Dakota were rounded up, put in a concentration camp at the base of Fort Snelling, and subsequently banned from MN with a bounty put on their heads, the Mendota community was swept up with all the other Dakota. It included men, women and children, many of whom died. While some tribes like Shakopee, Prairie Island, Lower and Upper Sioux eventually got some land back, the Mendota community did not. Their Pow Wow is held on property which the Dakota consider sacred, but they do not own a single inch of that earth. It is a tragic story, yet the Mendota Mdewakanton remain committed to the renewal of their people and we have been invited to share with and participate in that renewal through their Pow Wow and the closing feast. I am glad we have time to plan and I am glad we have Maria McNamara, another of our culinary experts, leading us in planning and getting organized for this Feast.

In the Gospel of Luke Jesus poses this question, ***“****For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? 29Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, 30saying, “This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.”* You mean to say no one planned to bring bread when we are having French Toast? You mean to say we only have food for 100 people when we have known all along that an average POW WOW has 300 people for the closing meal? Jesus clearly has the expectation that planning, looking ahead, counting the costs is essential for anyone wishing to share in the justice building, love transforming discipleship work of building God’s Realm.

Yet in our Gospel lesson today, Jesus faces a situation of human need, calling for a response, with absolutely no opportunity to plan in advance. Jesus has no intention of preaching to 5,000 plus people. We are hoping for a good turnout at Bundy’s art exhibit this coming Friday and the Art on the Ave planned for Saturday. We have flyers out. There was an article in the West Side Voice. We are posting to Facebook. Jesus did none of that. Just the opposite, according to Matthew, Jesus has gone out to a deserted place so he could have some time alone. He and the disciples have made absolutely no preparation for this huge crowd that follows him.

It is a situation not unlike the type of situation some of us are living with right now and anyone of us can face at a moment’s notice. We are planning one thing and suddenly we are faced with some human need that calls out for our attention. It may be a family member, it may be a neighbor, it may be a situation like the plight of children and families who are refugees from Central America, but whatever it is, there has been no time to plan, there is little opportunity to get organized. It may even be that like Jesus, we are very much in need of some time alone, a break from the caring and the support we have already been offering. Yet, there it is the very real human need is right in front of us and we have to decide, what will we do, how will we respond?

You heard in the Gospel lesson how the disciples initially respond. “There is no way we can feed all these people. We have had absolutely no time to plan. Our committee hasn’t even met. Maybe with a little advance notice we could have gotten some of those food trucks out here that are so popular. But, as it is, all we have is five loaves and two fish, in other words essentially nothing. We have nothing to share”.

This, of course, is an understandable feeling on the part of the disciples and on the part of anyone of us suddenly confronted with what looks like and feels like overwhelming needs. This is especially true when like the disciples we are people who care and because we care, we have already been giving and sharing. The disciples are with Jesus precisely because they are drawn to Jesus message of God’s love and justice. They have experienced firsthand Jesus care, concern, compassion for those in need. Yet, when the disciples look out at the crowds and look at what they have to offer, there first response is “we have nothing to share… Just these five loaves and two fish. Essentially nothing.”

The problem for the disciples is that they are operating out of a feeling of scarcity, the strong belief that there is never enough for everyone and so therefore, someone will have to go without. This, of course, is the belief system of Empires and in all honesty of economic systems like capitalism. They operate on the basis of scarcity, there is never enough for all, and they take it as a given that some people will have to go hungry, some people will become refugees, some people will be left to fend for themselves in nursing homes, or be forced off of their land into exile in the Dakotas. Scarcity feeds our fears, our anxieties, convincing us we have nothing to share, nothing to give.

Just prior to seeking some time alone, Jesus has received news that his cousin, John the Baptist, has been executed by Herod. Herod, of course, has been appointed by Rome to maintain this system of scarcity and privilege, by force and intimidation if necessary. Matthew tells us Herod was hosting a feast in honor of his birthday. The food was lavish, befitting a King. Deliciously seasoned meats, lamb, fish, beef. There were huge plates of freshly cooked vegetables, perfectly ripened fruit and deserts that would cause you to throw your diet plans out the window. There was wine a plenty. Finishing off the meal was an unexpected course, the Head of John Baptist served on a platter. The banquet of scarcity insists that some people must be sacrificed in order to keep fear alive, and convince folks that there is never enough to go around.

Jesus, of course, completely rejects the fear of scarcity, the belief there is never enough or the feeling that we have nothing to give.

On the contrary Jesus embraces the vision of the prophet Isaiah who speaking the word of God proclaims, “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price”. In the face of human need, without time to plan, prepare or get organized, Jesus is guided by his conviction that the abundance of God’s love, the abundance of God’s justice will never run out and can never be exhausted.

Jesus says to the disciples there is no need for a committee meeting. You have all that you need. Take these five loaves and two fish, use the talents, the resources, the gifts that you have and trust God will do the rest.

Biblical commentators have uniformly noticed that this story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 is remarkably like the story of Jesus breaking bread with the disciples in the upper room, just before he is killed by the powers of scarcity. Taking the five loaves, blessing the bread, giving it to the disciples. In this sacramental act of compassion, Jesus challenges the powers of scarcity with the abundance of God’s love and justice. Taking food in hand, Jesus gives it to the disciples, just as Jesus continues giving it to us, saying, “share this with the people. In the abundance of God’s love you have all that you need”.

**Isaiah 55:1-5**

*In our first lesson the prophet Isaiah, speaks to all those who have lost hope, accepting the domination of the Assyrian Empire or any empire. Empires operate on a basis of scarcity, with those who have easily turning their back on those without. In the face of this scarcity Isaiah insists God offers a banquet of abundance, one that is open to all regardless of their ability to pay. Yet, the banquet, Isaiah speaks of is more than just food or material need, it is the banquet of God’s abundant love.*

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

**Matthew 14:13-21**

*In our Gospel lesson today Jesus has just heard the news that King Herod has let his own birthday celebration become an occasion to execute John the Baptist. In response, Jesus seeks some time by himself. Yet this time alone is denied to him by the needs of a large crowd who follow Jesus. Rather than turn them away, Matthew tells us Jesus has compassion. As the day wears on the people are in need of food, but the disciples are convinced they have nothing to give. Jesus knows otherwise and in short while the abundance of God’s love is again revealed to all.*

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.