

## **9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost August 2, 2020**

### **Matthew 14:13-21**

Isn't it funny how the process of eating a meal can look so different?

There are the meals that have all the right tableware, and the settings are just so, the food is plated perfectly. The table itself and the presentation are part of the meal that is being served. Something that satisfies beyond just your appetite. The trend a few years ago of taking pictures of your meal and posting it online, stems from this idea that when we eat, we feed more than just our body. We feed our eyes, our smell, our touch, our spirit.

There are the meals where it is all about the food, and the cutlery and plates are just a means of delivering that goodness to you. I tend to associate these with BBQ. Where the time and energy is put into the meat and the sides. Good BBQ can take 12 hours or more to prepare well. Portions may not be huge, but the flavor more than satisfies. It is about savoring the juicy, fall off the bone, meat. It doesn't matter if you are using fingers, fine cutlery, or a spork... you just want to eat!

There are meals where it is all about just filling yourself. Quality and presentation will vary, but it really is mostly about being stuffed. These are the banquets, the all you can eat, the cheap but good meals. I've had these on good plates and paper plates, chased with a fine wine and cheap beer.

Now, one of the meals is not better than another. They all fulfill the same function and I would dare say that most of us have had meals like these in our lives. I would also say we have our own preferences for our favorite type of meal.

Our reading today from Matthew is about two meals- even though we only hear about one.

The first meal takes place just before this text. The birthday banquet that Herod throws for himself. Planned well in advance, I'm sure, to which only the important and powerful people were invited. One that would have been filled with abundance and overindulgence in – wine, food, dancing and general debauchery. One that led to Herod making a boastful promise, one that he fulfilled to save face, one that led to John the Baptist being beheaded.

The second meal is one that is not planned and to which exactly no one was invited. Jesus heard the news that his cousin John has been killed. The man who had baptized him and inaugurated Jesus' ministry. The one who had prepared the soil so that the seed of his Word would bloom. Dead. Beheaded by the government on the whim of its ruler. Jesus needs time to process this, space to grieve and figure out what to do next, so he goes to a deserted place, apart from everyone.

The people hear the news of John's beheading and their first thought is to find Jesus. You would hope that it was to offer their condolences and comfort, but they go in their need, their anger, their hopelessness in the face of a government that just doesn't seem to care for them. That imprisons them for speaking uncomfortable truths. That kills their leaders.

Jesus comes ashore, seeking a place of solitude and sees a throng of people. I wouldn't blame him if he had just turned the boat around and gone somewhere else. If he had complained, "Can't I just get one moment alone to grieve!" But instead, Jesus looks on this crowd and he has compassion. The word used says that the sight of this group moves his guts, hits him in the feels, and he moves among

them to restore those who are weak, to heal those who are sick. To minister to their need, their anger, their hopelessness.

With a crowd this large it takes time. Evening approaches and Jesus' handlers, the disciples, come to him, "It's time to dismiss the crowd, send them away into the surrounding towns to buy something to eat."

Jesus has another idea, "They don't need to go somewhere else to eat, you give them something."

The disciples demure, "We have nothing here! Well, except for five loaves and two fish." Left unsaid is that this will be little enough for thirteen of them. "What we have to offer is not going to be enough," they are saying.

Jesus' reply is, "Bring them here to me." Left unsaid is- "I'll make them enough."

So the crowd sits down in groups, Jesus takes this "nothing" offering of the disciples- 5 loaves and two fish- he says good words over them, a blessing that speaks well of what is offered- then he breaks the food and gives it to the disciples who feed the people.

And all eat, and were filled, and there are leftovers. Even though there were probably 12,000 men, women, and children there.

These meals reflect the people who host them. Herod's is about powerful people who get to overindulge in whatever they want; food, drink, physical pleasure with no care for others, the exercise of unchecked power. A meal that ultimately leads to death for anyone who might speak up about how this kind of living does not reflect God's desire for us.

Jesus' meal is about compassion for those who are in need. A banquet to which many are welcomed- those who are weak and sick, those who are angry and hopeless. It is one where "nothing" gets transformed into an abundance, enough for leftovers! It is not a meal of over-indulgence and waste, but one where everyone has enough to satisfy. It is a meal about life, fuller and more abundant.

These meals reflect the reign of those who host them. Herod's reign of this earth with winners and losers, filled with overindulgence for a few and death for everyone else. Jesus' reign of heaven, with everyone welcome, especially those who are weak, hopeless, angry- where even a little is blessed and broken to be enough for all and more than enough.

The meal Jesus presides at reflects the promise of God to us throughout time. It carries the lessons of manna and quail as the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. That it is God who provides us daily bread whether we deserve it or not and if you try and take more than you need the rest will turn to ashes in your mouth. Will rot and be filled with worms.

It carries the lesson of the Widow of Zerephath, who shares the last flour and oil she and her son have with the prophet Elijah and God turns that little bit of flour and oil into enough to feed them all for months.

It embodies what Jesus has just told them the reign of heaven is like- the smallest thing that when shared changes everything. It is the mustard seed planted, it is the yeast hidden in the flour.

The feeding of the five thousand is the reign of heaven made real by Jesus. Put into practice so that the disciples might see that the reign of heaven is not some distant thing to look forward to, but a present reality to bring into being.

This Meal we will share today, communion, does the same thing. Like our worship, it makes real the reign of heaven in our lives and it helps us practice what living in that reign will look like.

For that is what our worship together is, a training ground for kingdom living. A place where we seek out Jesus and confess our sin, our brokenness, our hopelessness, our anger. A place where Jesus ministers to us, forgiving, mending, healing, inspiring, calming.

A place where we practice being generous with what we have. Trusting that the “nothing” we offer God can turn into enough. Knowing that what we have been given is not ours to have but ours to share, for we may be the means by which someone receives daily bread.

A place where we know there is enough, and more than enough, for all. Enough to satisfy our hunger, in body and spirit. A place where just some bread and some wine will transform us even as the yeast transforms flour. Changing its very nature even without seeming to.

This Meal we share today, for the first time in almost four months, is the embodiment of what it means to believe in Jesus, God’s Son, whose presence on earth changed everything. Whose claim on us and presence in this Meal changes us.

Us, who have come in search of Jesus because we too are angry, hopeless, fearful, in need of healing and forgiveness... weak. We come because we know that it is only Jesus who can heal us. Because we know that he is compassionate and merciful. That his reign is what will save us.

The Meal we will share today isn't much- a wafer and a sip of wine. But as with that Meal by the lakeshore, Jesus will turn it into enough. Enough for the healing of our lives. Enough for the healing of the nations. Enough, so that we might be emboldened... as the disciples were eventually... to take the risk that our "nothing" talent... our "nothing" witness might be transformed by Jesus into enough. Enough to bring life to someone else's life.