

Pentecost 9 2020 Devotional

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Isaiah 55:1-5 Romans 9:1-5 Matthew 14:13-21

COMPASSION

I love Jesus' words: *"They don't have to go away. You feed them."*

If you listen deeply to the Gospel text, you can hear the disciples' stammering, flabbergasted astonishment. Stuttering and a little bit outraged, I love the first three words of their response even more than I love Jesus words. They say: "We've got nothing." Well, except for just 2-1/2 fish sandwiches between the 12 of them. Not even enough for themselves and Jesus. So yeah, "We've got next to nothing."



And with that, Jesus multiplied the food, fed the multitude, and had plenty left over.

The miracle of Jesus feeding more than five thousand men, women, and children is a widely studied miracle. Some focus on the blessing of the loaves and bread and suggest that this miracle is perhaps the precursor of the communion meal. Others focus on the satiated crowd or the symbolism of the twelve full baskets. While all these observations are notable, the simple detail that Jesus did not send the people away is also remarkable. Instead of commanding them to leave, he orders them to stay and sit down on the grass. He then gets to work doing what he has come to do—curing every disease and sickness among the people.

The multiplication of the loaves of bread and the fish harken to the previous parables that Jesus shared along the Sea of Galilee. speaks to the crowd concerning the mustard seed. The kingdom of heaven produces a plentiful harvest from the smallest of seeds.

This miracle demonstrates that Jesus attends to the physical needs of the people. He does not focus solely on their spiritual health through his teaching. He is also concerned that they are sick. He empathizes with those who are hungry. Are we as concerned about the physical health of God's people as Jesus is or, do we focus only on our spiritual health? Like the disciples, do we naively send people away when we think our resources are too limited to have an impact?

In the kingdom of heaven, there is compassion, people share their resources, and there is more than enough for everyone. At this point in the gospel, perhaps the disciples had only gone through an incomplete transformation. Although they had grown and were maturing in their faith, they had not been completely changed. But there is hope...and so also this story from the Gospel can change us, as we are moved by compassion and attend to both the spiritual and physical needs of God's people.

