

Matthew 14:13-31, 9th Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, August 2, 2020
Pastor Karen Boda

A reading from the fourteenth chapter of Matthew, beginning at the 13th verse.

¹³ 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. ¹⁴ When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. ¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." ¹⁷ They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." ¹⁸ And he said, "Bring them here to me." ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. ²¹ And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

I'm Pastor Karen Boda, Assistant to the Bishop for Congregational Life. It is an honor and a privilege to bring you greetings from Bishop Kevin Strickland and all of your synod staff.

We have in front of us such a familiar gospel passage today. Perhaps even one to which we can relate. It's a story that begins with an exhausted Jesus. He's just heard the news that John the Baptist was beheaded at Herod's banquet. Violence and fear are now spreading through the Roman empire.

Can you imagine the load Jesus is now under? He's physically and emotionally empty. He's got nothing left, so he heads out in a boat to get away from the crowds. He needs a break. But the crowds follow him. Despite what's going on in the world, despite his own exhaustion, Jesus has enough left to cure their sick. He has compassion for them and he cares.

But the disciples try to protect Jesus. They want to give him a well-deserved break so suggest that he send the crowds back into the villages for them to buy their own food. Jesus says no. You feed them. The disciple's response? We have nothing. Nothing but the contents of a little boy's lunch. Only 5 loaves and 2 fish. We don't have enough. How can this little boy's lunch feed a hungry crowd of 5000 plus women and children? The disciples didn't pass on even what they had ...because they didn't think it was enough.

It so often feels like we too don't have enough. Our society, our media – it seems like everything tells us that no matter how much we have, it is not enough.

This pandemic has us all scrambling for the last roll of toilet paper, Clorox wipes, and hand sanitizer. For reasons I don't understand, I still can't find yeast. There isn't enough.

As congregations, we claim we don't have enough children or young people or butts in the pew. We publish the treasurer's report in our bulletins each week which tells us we don't have enough money. We can't start new ministries because we don't have enough volunteers. When have we, like the disciples, failed to pass on the things that we do have because we don't think we have enough?

This is so much more than looking at the glass half full instead of half empty. It's looking at what we do have and knowing that it is enough. It's knowing that in Jesus' hands, even a little boy's lunch is enough.

In a story that went viral recently, Kate McClure of New Jersey ran out of gas and was stalled on an exit ramp. A homeless veteran used his last \$20 to buy her enough gas to get her home.

An elderly woman I know is in a care facility. She's on very limited income and can no longer financially support the congregation she loves. She can't get out because of the virus. She struggles to write cards or make phone calls. But she is a mighty prayer warrior! Her prayers are enough to change the world!

Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Hiram, Georgia struggled. They didn't have enough members or finances to keep the doors open Sunday after Sunday. But as they were struggling, they looked at what they had. Earlier this year they had a Holy Closure, sold their building and property, then made substantial donations to seminary scholarships and women's education at the Milagro Center in Guatemala. They supported Lutheranch and Inspiritus, training for rostered ministers and even funds to support other congregations. Their legacy lives on. They had enough!

Jesus blessed the bread and fish, placed it in the hands of the disciples so they could pass the food out to the crowd. What I really love about this story is that after the disciples passed out the food, they had to decide what to do with all the leftovers! In Jesus' hands, what we have isn't just enough. It is more than enough!

And you know what? Not only do we have enough. We are enough. That's really an important point. We are enough.

Brene Brown, a research professor at the University of Houston, claims that we so often fall into the "I am not enough" trap. I am not good enough, thin enough, rich enough, beautiful enough, smart enough, experienced enough, trained enough...fill in your own blank....enough.

I am not enough to be loved by others. I am not enough to be loved by God. I am not enough.

Our gospel story today, though, is a counter narrative to that loud negative and comparative voice in our heads. With Jesus, what we have is enough. We are enough.

What is really powerful is that Jesus asks us to dream bigger. Jesus saw the lunch and didn't see only enough to feed a little boy. He saw enough to feed multitudes.

We too need to see a world in which there is enough food for all, shelter, clothing, and education. Enough health care, love and inclusion. Justice. Jesus asks us to look in our own lives, look in our own congregations. To imagine. To dream. To see the possibilities.

I had to laugh at a John Maxwell quote I read recently. He asks why God would send new people and resources into our churches if we don't have a God-sized dream? Why would God multiply our resources if the biggest thing we have planned for this year is to paint the restrooms?

God wants us to dream God-sized dreams because in God's hands there is enough.

Amen.