

“Impossible Insufficiency”

Scripture: Matthew 14: 13-21

Our text this morning is a familiar text. In fact, all the Gospels share this story in some shape or form. So there has to be something pretty special about this story for all four Gospels writers to share it. There must be something pretty significant about the Gospel message found in this text that we are supposed to claim and live out in our lives as Jesus’ disciples. So this morning I invite us to take another look at this pretty spectacular familiar story.

From the very first line, we know that even in this familiar story, there is something a little different about Matthew’s version. We discover that in the very first line that Jesus has received some news and he wants to withdraw to a deserted place. He has received the news that John the Baptist has been killed and we get the impression that this news has shattered his world. John the Baptist, the prophet who has been calling the nation of Israel to prepare the way for the Kingdom of God, has been killed by the powers that be, killed by Herod as a gift to his step daughter, killed because he spoke a message that rocked too many foundations.

This news of John the Baptist’s death did something to Jesus and all he wants to do was withdraw to some deserted place for a while, to withdraw to grieve, withdraw to figure his next steps. Maybe Jesus needs to withdraw because

it has just become real how far the powers that be will go to quiet down this talk of a new Kingdom here on earth. Maybe he needs to withdraw because reality has just become too much, too real, to “in your face” for Jesus at that moment and he needs to be alone.

Because of this news, in that moment, Jesus feels like he has nothing to give and needs some time alone. But when he gets to that deserted place, Jesus discovers that it isn't so deserted after all. The crowd has followed him and now there are five thousand people, not counting women and children, waiting for him to give them something, something to nourish them, something to feed them, something to bring them hope.

And what does Jesus do? He doesn't send them away. He has compassion for them. He heals the sick. He cures their ailments. He has compassion for them and his feelings of nothingness are turned into something life changing, life-giving, life sustaining. Healing just doesn't happen for the crowd that day but for Jesus as well. In that moment, when all Jesus wants to do is pull away, compassion breaks through the darkness that Jesus is experiencing and turns on the light of hope. Compassion performs a miracle of its own and that feeling of insufficiency, that feeling of nothing to give, that feeling like Jesus had nothing to offer becomes an experience of abundance for everyone that day. All because Jesus felt compassion for the crowd that day. That is what Matthew is drawing our attention to as Jesus'

disciples. Even in the darkest moment, Jesus had compassion for others, just like we are called to do here on earth as disciples of Christ.

The wonderful thing about Matthew's version of this story is that Matthew takes away our excuses as Jesus' disciples and shows us even though we may be feeling like we have nothing to give, God is still working in our world, working to use our nothingness to do something amazing, something life changing because the truth is that real ministry does not simply rely on our own human abilities. True ministry relies on the Spirit of God. It relies on the Spirit of God having compassion on God's creation. It relies on the Spirit of God creating opportunities for healing and wholeness to occur for all of God's children. True ministry relies on the Spirit of God still moving, still working, still making something out of nothing. True ministry relies fully on the Spirit of God, not us. And that is part of the good news for us this morning.

Because if we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that we have all found ourselves in the same types of moments like Jesus experienced in our text this morning. We have all been there, those moments where we just can't take or hear one more tidings of bad news, those moments where we feel drained, spiritually, emotionally, physically, those moments where we just can't go on because we are too overwhelmed with the bad news of the world, where hate is

real and alive, where good people are hurt and killed, where nothing makes sense anymore.

In our Scripture today, Matthew is reassuring us that as disciples of Christ, even Jesus found himself wanting to retreat to those deserted dark lonely places. Even Jesus wanted a few moments to wallow in his feelings of nothingness. Even Jesus wanted to go away when reality became too much. Matthew is reassuring us that even Jesus had those times when he felt like he had nothing to give, emotionally, spiritually, maybe even physically. But the story doesn't end there. The story continues with God's compassion.

We are not left alone in those moments when we want to withdraw to a deserted place. God meets us there and has compassion on us. The good news that Matthew is reminding us of this morning by telling us this familiar story is that even in those darkest moments, even in those most deserted moments, even in those loneliest moments, Jesus didn't shut himself off from God's grace, God's love, and most importantly, God's compassion. And we should not do so either. Because the story doesn't end there. Matthew is reminding us that when we want to withdraw and close the door, God is still working, still moving, still creating. We are called to keep ourselves open to God, to turn those moments when we think we have nothing to give over to God, then step back and experience the true

abundance of God that is something, really something amazing and wonderful, something that is always available for all of God's children.

In our Scripture today, Matthew is reminding us that when we think we have nothing to give, than that is the time we need to take a step back and become reconnected with the abundance of God once more. Not because we will suddenly be changed as disciples, ready to do ministry. No, Matthew is inviting us to turn to God in those moments because when we truly step back and get reconnected with the abundance of God, we will remember that the true blessing of God is that throughout our story as people of faith, God has taken people and things that were broken, blessed them, and they became opportunities for new life for all of God's children. And our story doesn't end there. God is still meeting us, having compassion on us today. God takes the broken, the nothingness that we give, the items that we think are not good enough, blesses them, and fills the world with the abundance of grace and compassion. Matthew wants us to remember our story doesn't end in the deserted places. God meets us there and has compassion on us, just like the many times that God has done before and will continue to do so in our lives.

We know that our story as people of faith includes a story where God took a man named Moses who claimed not to be a very good speaker, who was sure that there was someone more qualified than him to lead the people of out of Egypt, who

had run away because he killed a man, blessed him and through the abundant blessings of God, Moses became a powerful leader for the people of Israel.

We know that Our story as people of faith includes a story where God took an ordinary shepherd boy who was small in stature and young in age, blessed him, and through the abundant blessings of God, this young shepherd became one of the most powerful kings in all of Israel.

We know that Our story includes the story that we heard today, where God took a simple feast of fishes and loaves, not enough to even feed a family of five, let alone five thousand people, blessed it, passed it around and there were twelve baskets left over after the meal.

We know Our story includes a story where God took a man, broken on the cross, with nothing left to give, blessed him, and provided new life for all of God's creation.

We know Our story as people of faith is filled with examples of how God takes those moments when there seems nothing left to offer, blesses them and turns those moments of nothingness into something, turns those moments of deserted places into moments of compassion and grace, turns those moments of despair into moments of abundance where all are satisfied.

Matthew is reminding us today that as people of faith we must never forget that the ministry of Christ in which we engage in daily "pivots not on how much

[we] have or what [we] can give but rather on how much” God does with our nothingness by blessing it and passing it around until all are satisfied.

Today, we are invited to get reconnected with the abundance of God, to remember our story is full of examples of how God took the broken, blessed it, and gave it to God’s people. Today we are invited to open ourselves up to God’s compassion, to experience the healing and wholeness of God once more.

Today we are invited to give over to God our impossible insufficiencies and to witness them being turned into something amazing, something life giving, something life changing, turned into something that is enough for all, that is sufficient for the ministry of Christ, that is plenty to go around, even with a few leftovers to spare.

Today, we are being invited to step out of the deserted place and to experience God’s compassion once more.

May we always open ourselves, even in our nothingness, to the somethingness that is the blessing of God. Amen.