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**St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church – Florissant, MO**  
**Proper 13, August 2, 2020**  
**Matthew 14:13-21**

This week in Matthew's Gospel, we move from parables to miracles. Last week we heard Jesus talk about the Kingdom of Heaven – we learned that it is big and bold, that it's surprising, and it's subversive. This morning, we witness a miracle – out of meager resources, thousands of people are fed. So Jesus first tells us about the Kingdom of Heaven and then he demonstrates it. Apparently, it's a place where all are fed.

But the lectionary skips some important parts of the story. After preaching to the crowd in parables Matthew tells us that Jesus goes home. He begins to teach the people in their synagogue. These might have been the kids he grew up with, the grandmothers who fed him and watched him grow. They were the people he lived among and worshipped with. They are astounded at his words. They were surprised by what they heard because it was not what they expected. Who does he think he is? He is just Mary's son, the carpenter's son – he's one of us and he is acting way above his station. They can't see God hiding in plain sight. So the words of Jesus offend them and they reject him.

Then Matthew tells us that Jesus hears of the brutal death of John the Baptist at the hands of Herod. Herod was afraid, he thought he had squashed this challenge to his power by killing John the Baptist. But now it's happening again with Jesus. Who is this Jesus? Herod wonders if this is John, back from the dead to threaten his rule? Jesus is threatening to Herod just as John was, because he is preaching a way of life very different from the hierarchical patronage system

of the day. John announced and Jesus embodies a way that is based on God's overflowing love for all of humanity, not just for a few.

The miracle that we hear about this morning isn't a moment of magic, it's a faithful response to a world that says don't dream too big, and don't believe for a minute there is enough to go around. It is an act of compassion and defiance. Jesus's miracle shows us what this Kingdom, this way of living in covenant with God, is all about. We learn that Herod serves power. Jesus serves the weak. This is a dangerous story – we need to be careful not to romanticize it. Following Jesus will not be easy. It will ask a lot of us. Sometimes it will mean we face rejection or failure, and sometimes it will mean that we bump up against the powers of our own day that tell us there isn't enough for everybody so we had better watch out for ourselves. It may mean that we are scared but we that we take the risk of being compassionate anyway.

I love how it always take the disciples a while to get it. They are so used to the way things have always been that they don't completely grasp what Jesus is preaching. Isn't that just like us? I love that we have these imperfect role models! Here we see the disciples concerned about the people. They see the hour getting late and they are worried that the crowd will go hungry. So, they tell Jesus to send the people away to take care of themselves. But sending them away means sending them back into an economic system of scarcity – a system where the few hold all the resources and power and the rest are left to scramble for their basic needs. The disciples care, they are concerned about the crowd, but maybe not enough to get involved.

I get that. How could they do anything in the face of such need? How can they challenge the system that leaves so many people hungry? It must have been overwhelming. The needs were so great, and their resources were so few. Haven't we all felt the same way at times

watching the evening news or reading the papers? As a church it's easy for us to feel overwhelmed, too. How can we do anything? We are getting older. We are a smaller community than we used to be. The community around us has changed. How can we make a difference? What do we have to offer?

Notice that Jesus doesn't say, "I've got this. Step aside." He says, "You give them something to eat." The disciples only have 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. They call that nothing. But Jesus says **it's not nothing! You have what you need.** Jesus is telling them that they are not powerless in the face of need. He is calling them, and he is calling us, to trust that together, with God's grace, we have what we need to feed the hungry among us, to heal the brokenness around us, to reach out into our neighborhoods with compassion.

Jesus **takes** what little the disciples have and he **blesses** it, he **breaks** it, and he **gives** it to them – just as he will later do at the last supper. In his actions both in this moment of compassion for the hungry crowd that we encounter today and at the last supper that we experience when we celebrate the Eucharist, we are drawn in to God's dream. We become participants in the new order that God is establishing in the world. This is why it's so painful that we can't receive the Eucharist right now. It's painful because the Eucharist is what defines us. It's where we become who we are meant to be. In the Eucharist our dreams of feeding and healing a hungry and broken world are born and nurtured. It is still our dream, even if our act of love right now is to fast from it. We carry deep with us the memory of Jesus looking to heaven and becoming nourishment for us so that we can become nourishment for the world.

In our Gospel story this morning Jesus is calling us to dream big. Sure people might say, you're just that church on the corner that's always been there. WE might question what we have to offer today to a changing neighborhood. But Jesus tells us this morning that we have what we

need to bring God's abundant love to one another and to our neighbors. As overwhelming as this moment in time is, let's take the risk together of believing in miracles. Let's make this our story. Even in the face of this frightening pandemic, even though we can't be physically together right now, even as we struggle as a country with our sins of racism and division, Jesus invites us to dream of God's reign among us. I invite you, in the weeks and months to come, to join me in dreaming of ways that St. Barnabas can live into Jesus's call to heal divisions and to feed the crowds with whatever we have. What is your dream for our corner of God's kingdom?