

Sermon “Lots of Good News”
Sunday August 2, 2026
Kirk of St James
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I had Theo at a friends’ birthday party yesterday. A group of parents were huddled in the drizzling rain, coffee in hand, watching intrepid and determined children alternate between bouncing on a trampoline and playing on an inflatable water slide for two hours, until their lips turned blue. While we were standing there the conversation shifted to a discussion around capacity. A number of people mentioned things that they had to shift their perspective on in order to not burn out. So, for example one parent was talking about how their yard was always a disaster with bikes and other things laying around, but in the run of a day they let go of trying to keep everything looking perfect because it wasn’t necessary or crucial.

We all make decisions like this in our daily lives about how much time we have, and how much space we have to take things on in our “free” time. We understand all too well how busy life can be, and it takes time to learn how to try and balance things. Now the bad news is, these observations are going to fly directly in the face of what happens in Matthew today.

When we read about Jesus feeding the five thousand it is easy to lose sight of the opening lines of this passage in light of the miracle that later takes place but, this narrative could have had a very different ending than the one we know and cherish.

This passage begins by Jesus hearing about the death of John the Baptist. When the news reaches Jesus, he decides he needs to get away, he needs quiet and some time to think. Those are feelings we likely know and relate to. However, what he needs and what happens next are very different things. I often think of Galilee as being small and sparsely populated but the reality was it was surprisingly populated. It was an area, fifty miles north to south and twenty-five miles east to west. The ancient historian Josephus tells us that within that area there were 204 towns and villages none with a population of less than 15 000. All things considered it

would have been difficult to find peace. Jesus' plan is to take a boat across to the other side of the lake which was quieter. However, people saw the boat going and it was not difficult to figure out where they were headed so the crowds flooded around the lake and were waiting when Jesus landed.

It must have been exhausting when Jesus gets there and sees everyone, and all the needs, and all of the expectations. He could have decided that this was his time and he was going to get it and set off in the boat again to try and find peace somewhere else. Instead, Jesus looks out at everyone who has so anxiously followed him and feels nothing but compassion for them. He wades ashore and begins healing and curing them. While on tour in Israel were told that up to half of the population in the ancient world needed medical help of some sort due to disease, illness, dental problems among other things. That is one of the reasons why when people heard about Jesus and his ability to heal, they flocked to him. By the end of the day the disciples need a rest, and they are anxious to send the crowds away to "find food" in town.

Jesus' response to the disciples has become one of the most well known, and well-loved stories in the Bible. This particular account is so significant it is the only one that can be found in all four of the gospels. Here we see the heart of who Jesus is, and in turn who he tells us to be. Throughout his ministry there are moments where Jesus does take time and space to go and pray, where he puts a boundary in place so he can do what he needs to. On this particular day though Jesus does not feel that need, instead all of his actions are guided by love and compassion for the people gathered. Jesus tells the disciples to take two fish and five loaves, not even enough food to feed themselves as a group of disciples and use it to feed all of the people gathered.

They most likely thought Jesus had been out in the sun too long that day. They are looking at those fish and loaves thinking "there is no way!" As they stand there with their meager offering, when they see how little it is, it just seems impossible. How can we take these

few things and use them in the way Jesus is telling us too? Jesus is not worried, he takes the 7 items, he blesses them and soon everyone is fed in abundance. Not only was everyone full, but they had baskets of leftovers.

One author commented that in this moment we learn three things that are vital for us to know. Firstly, that Jesus was compassionate. Despite everything going on in his life, Jesus had compassion. One thing that Christians have struggled with throughout history is how to show compassion and care for others around us. One of the great divides and struggles in mission work is how we do this? Some people in the past have said we need to address people's spiritual hunger; we need to teach people about Jesus. Others have said we need to first care for people and their physical needs (like hunger) first. What is surprising is that often throughout history people have tended place priority on one to the detriment of the other. The problem is this approach does not treat people as a whole—as both a spiritual, and physical being. What Jesus did that day was treat people holistically. He healed them, he fed them, he ministered to them. He showed compassion on them fully. From their most basic needs up. What a fantastic model to follow in our own lives as we seek to show compassion as well.

The second thing this passage teaches us according to the author, is that God has entrusted us with great responsibility. That day Jesus took the bread and blessed it, but he did not feed the 5000. He told the disciples to do it. As one person said “God has entrusted us to be the body of Christ—the hands and feet through which God's work is done in the world. God does not act alone, but through people, you and me. To follow Jesus is to express our faith in concrete acts of love, justice and compassion towards others.” That day Jesus looked at his disciples and said to them in no uncertain terms “You got this.” He knew they were capable and so are we, as we continue to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world.

The third lesson the author mentioned is that this story reminds us “When we need it most, God will give us the power to work for good in the world, a reality many of us have

discovered when faced with situations we were not sure we could manage.” One of the realities of being part of the Church today is that often we may feel like we do not have enough. We do not have enough people, we do not have enough money, and we do not have enough time. But this passage today stands in direct contrast to that way of thinking and feeling. It reminds us that when we gather in God’s name together, when we are faithful with what we have been given, we can do great things. The reality is we may always feel like the disciples did as they stood there gathered around 2 fish and 5 loaves of bread, thinking “This is it?!” But God is at the heart of it saying “yes, but it is also enough and actually it not just enough, it is abundance.”

There is a lot of good news in this story. The good news is that Jesus showed compassion to everyone. The good news is that we are the hands and feet of Christ in the world showing that same compassion to others. And lastly that as we look down at what maybe feels like inadequate resources, God calls us to have the courage to go into the world knowing that in unity together, through the power of the Holy Spirit we continue that work. We may not be on a Galilean hillside, but we are still called to be partners with the same God of compassion and abundance. And that my friends is good news!