

Enough IS Enough!*

Matthew 14:13-21

Homily Preached by Rev. Phyllis A. Norman August 3, 2008

Prospect Congregational Church, UCC

Finally spring had arrived in Israel. The land was once again fresh and green from the March and April rains. Wild flowers were blooming all over the hillsides. It was time for Passover, Israel's greatest feast. The Hebrew people traveled great distances from their homes to the city of Jerusalem, to the Temple. This was the time of religious aliveness: traveling and fasting and feasting.

It was a popular time for Jesus. His popularity had risen as word of his healings spread. It was as if Neal Diamond had come to Prospect to sing on the Green. Thousands would come to hear Jesus preach and teach.

But it was also a time of sadness in Israel. John the Baptist, the greatest moral force of his time, the first prophet to come in four hundred years, had been beheaded. John was the one people looked to for moral and religious inspiration—King Herod had ordered his execution—everyone was stunned by John's death, an enormous loss. John had baptized Jesus; they were cousins, and Jesus grieved.

Jesus wanted to get away to a quiet, secluded place for a while. He sailed across Lake Galilee to a remote spot some four miles from where he had been, to grieve the loss of his friend. Meanwhile, back on the other side of the lake the crowds could see from the shore where Jesus was sailing. They followed along the shoreline as they kept a keen eye on the boat. When Jesus landed some of the people had already arrived.

How do you think Jesus reacted to the thousands who showed up? Irritated? Angry? Imposed upon? No. Jesus looked on the crowd with compassion, as if they were sheep without a shepherd, people in need of spiritual nourishment for their internal spiritual hunger. Jesus taught them and healed them, and the day passed quickly. As the day began to wane, the disciples said, "Lord, the hour is late and the people don't have any food and we are a long way from any villages. Maybe you should send them home now." As the story is told in all four Gospels and we glean a bit from each story we know the disciples hadn't enough money to purchase food so Jesus told them to look around and see what they could find among the people. Andrew found a young boy with five loaves of bread and two fish. He brought the boy to Jesus. Jesus took the bread, looked up to heaven, gave thanks for it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples to share with the people. All of them ate and all of them were satisfied, AND there were twelve baskets of bread left over. 5,000 men were fed along with countless women and children.

The next chapter of Matthew includes another miraculous feeding story from 7 loaves of bread and a few small fish. This time 4,000 men were fed, along with many women and children. Seven baskets of leftovers were collected.

These stories capture the very essence of God, God's abundant and extravagant generosity and grace. These two stories also capture the essence of the disciples who didn't get it the first time, or the second time even after they had already experienced God's miraculous work in their lives!

Do we get it? Our culture says no, emphatically! One little boy came to hear Jesus talk. His Mom had packed him a basket of food that would last him throughout the day, and that boy willingly and without so much as a whine or whimper, gave it ALL to Andrew to feed a hungry crowd. A little boy gave all he had to Jesus. He held nothing back for himself. We often look at this miracle story as one of transformation of bread to feed countless lives. This morning we look at this story as one of transformed hearts. What was really transformed was the selfish hearts of thousands, for when the crowd saw the example of this little boy as he gave his bread and fish to Jesus, the crowd was inspired to look inside coats and jackets and pockets and share the food they had brought with them, food hidden, concealed from others. The real transformation was not the loaves of bread but the selfish hearts. The Bible says, "And a little child shall lead them."

The question: which is the greater miracle in this story: transformed bread or transformed hearts? Some of us would rather focus on the bread—perhaps that is because we want to avoid focusing off us. If we focus on the bread and how so little fed so many, then we can safely avoid the transforming miracle we need in our lives and hearts. Trust me, if Jesus came to the United States today and performed that miracle, and transformed millions of selfish hearts, we would feed the whole world! In fact Jesus said today we would perform greater miracles than he did; if the selfish hearts of Christians were transformed, we would feed the entire globe. People are hungry not because there is a scarcity of food; people are hungry because of the greed of the richest countries in the world.

Remember in the story Jesus told the disciples, "You give them something to eat." That was a challenge to them and they responded whining, "We only have what the boy gave us: five loaves and two fish." We have a world filled with hungry people and Jesus says, "You give them something to eat." Better still, we live outside a city that has people who are hungry and Jesus says to you and me, "You give them something to eat." Maybe we respond, "I only have a little," but look what Jesus did with a little—through the miracle of changed hearts there was enough! It is truly amazing what Jesus can do with the little we have! We have the resources to end hunger in our country and around the world. These resources are not limited to what we can physically donate; we can use our mouths and our votes to change policies and conditions that allow hunger to persist.

Today we thank God for abundant food, and ask God to help us see and understand our responsibility to share our abundance with others.

*Story-telling idea of the Gospel reading comes from Rev. Markquart, Seattle, Washington.