

Enough – a sermon on Matthew 14:13-33

Jesus was grieving. He had just heard that John had been killed at the hands of King Herod. So he was headed away to pray. But the crowd, who might very well also have been grieving, followed him, because they had heard of his teachings and miracles.

If this crowd that had gathered round was familiar with the same Jewish texts as Jesus, perhaps they were remembering that famous line from the Psalms, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” Maybe that’s why there wasn’t much grumbling about them being hungry.

Eventually the disciples grew concerned that night was coming and the crowd would indeed want something to eat. So they go to Jesus, asking about how they might feed the followers around them. After a short little conversation, Jesus gets to what has to happen...

“You give them something to eat...” And it is here that we find a profound shift in responsibility. Frequently Jesus himself has done the healing and transforming, but in this moment he calls the disciples to step up and reject the myth of scarcity. Although at first the disciples are still paralyzed by fear and stuck in their limited human imaginations, Jesus is patient with them. They balk and protest about limited resources. There is not nearly enough to go around. There is no way this can work out. They seem to have forgotten the many miracles they have already witnessed.

We know this intersection in our lives so well. We know the familiar feeling of being overwhelmed by what is expected of us. The needs that surround us seem insurmountable. Pick an area of suffering – cancer, global hunger, wars, domestic violence, addiction – and the needs seem beyond our resources to respond. We revert to our own narrow minds, forgetting the expanse

and freedom promised by God. So paralyzed by anxiety are we that we forget the thousand other times that God entered in unexpectedly and made a way when there seemed like no way. From parting the Red Sea to stilling storms, with manna and miracles abounding, our memories are short when our bellies are empty and night is falling.¹

So Jesus tells them, “Bring them here to me.” And the little food that the disciples had became enough for them all, the men, women, and children who had all gathered to here Jesus teach. And not only was there enough, but there were leftovers too.

And with night continuing to fall, and possibly still grieving, Jesus sent the disciples ahead of him in the boat, and he dismissed the crowds, and finally got to get away by himself to pray.

¹ Liz Forney in *Feasting on the Gospels: Matthew vol. 2*, p.11

And we find a story about there being enough food for all to eat transforming into an adventure on the open sea. For that boat with the disciples was in the middle of a storm and they were all afraid. Peter sees Jesus coming to them from the other side. And wanting to be comforted he jumps ship and again, we witness the miraculous.

Peter walks there on the lake, through the storm, towards Jesus. But then there's the wind that shakes Peter's faith, and he starts sinking.

There are plenty of things in our lives that can blow like the wind our faith is shaken. In seminary, one of my professors, Kim Long would often say, "That on the days when my faith is weakest and I can't sing, pray or live as I think I should... on those days that's when others in the community sing and pray and live on my behalf. That's the blessing of a community of faith, there is always enough to go around."

And that's an incredibly promising part of having faith to share. Because what if in this story of faith, or the lack thereof, we are not Peter sinking but rather we are the hand of Christ reaching out to the world around us.

What if we were to turn from our fear of not having enough, to embrace God's incredible abundance of love and grace?

Isn't that the hard part of these two stories that we have before us this morning...

That depending on the way we read them they can point to the myth of scarcity. That there is not enough to go around for everyone to get what they need. Not enough food. Not enough faith. There is never enough...

That makes us question even more...

Andrew Foster Connors reflecting on this text writes,

What if I take the greatest risk of my faith and God does not meet me? What if the suffering I encounter responding to God's call is larger than the hope my faith is supposed to offer? What if I step out and discover my faith is not strong enough?

The church too faces similar fears. What if our church is not able to respond to the emergent needs of the changing neighborhood or the changing society? What if our newest efforts to revamp worship, or reach out to younger people do not succeed? What then?

These fears are real, as real as the storm that Peter steps into. Simply focusing on Jesus may not necessarily do anything to calm the storm. No amount of faith may end the difficult times the church is negotiating. No amount of trust may calm the fears of a nation still scared to death by just how vulnerable life is. No amount of prayer is guaranteed to calm the storms that sometimes rage within every life, within every home.

Nevertheless, the words Jesus offers, even before Peter steps out of the boat, could not be more clear: “Take heed, it is I; do not be afraid”. Whatever the storm, whatever the uncertainties, whatever the fears, the church that is willing to risk a closer step toward Jesus has nothing to fear. With him, there is courage to engage every change, every uncertainty, every fear. Without him, we do not have much to offer the world. With him, there is little else we need.²

A couple of years ago at a conference I heard John Bell of the Iona community sing a beautiful short song that he had written.

Don't be afraid, my love is stronger,
my love is stronger than your fear.
Don't be afraid, my love is stronger,
and I have promised, promised to be always near.

² Andrew Foster Connors in *Feasting on the Gospels: Matthew vol. 2*, p.18

And it is here at this table where we encounter the full nearness of Christ.

It is at this table, where Christ waits for us, having called us to leave our boat,
that there is already enough.

Enough food for all who hunger.

Enough faith for all who seek to be filled.

Enough hands reaching out to those in need.

There is always enough here.

So like that crowd that couldn't imagine all the leftovers,

Or like Peter that couldn't believe he was sinking,

Let us be nourished by the Spirit of Christ that we find before us,

Calling us here to this holy meal –

Where with Christ as our host we all will find enough for our souls and stomachs to be full.

Alleluia, and Amen.