

Matthew 14:13-21

Pentecost 11; August 16, 2020

What do you say to someone whose life is falling apart? If you have but few precious minutes with a person who's lost a job, home, spouse, child, or all sense of purpose, what comfort do you give? Perhaps, you have said something like this: *"God will never give you more than you can bear."* Ever used that one? It's a way of saying that you're going to get through whatever difficulty you're going through, that it's going to be ok in the end, that the bad times won't last. Would it surprise you that this statement is not found in the Bible? The closest verse to that phrase is found in 1 Corinthians 10. **"No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."** But that passage deals specifically with the temptation to sin, and not with the different pressures of life. Paul is writing about temptations in 1 Corinthians 10. He is describing a temptation that is like a snare trying to drag us into sin. He's not talking about the bad things that happen to us in life.

The truth is that there are times when life is too much to bear. Life is full of hardships; we go through things all the time that we are not able to handle. But the good news is, you don't need to be able to handle everything in order to keep going. You don't need to be able to handle everything to live a joyful, contented life. Perhaps, that is what Jesus wanted his disciples, and us, to learn from this miracle of the Feeding of the 5,000.

Matthew begins: **"When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place."** Who could blame Jesus for wanting to get away for some *alone* time? His co-worker, his cousin, his forerunner, John the Baptist had just been beheaded. Why? Because King Herod had thrown a party where he had too much to drink and made a ridiculous promise to a girl who had danced for him. She asks for the head of John the Baptist. John had spent his entire life preparing people for Jesus' ministry. So when Jesus heard the news, he took it hard. As a human being, Jesus felt pain and sadness. He just needed to get away from the crowds. I think, we can all understand that feeling. They got into a boat and sailed away to a deserted place.

But the crowds didn't leave Jesus alone. They **"followed him on foot from the towns."** Who could have blamed Jesus if he had pushed the crowd away? I think we could even understand if he Jesus had said something like this: *"Can you come back later?"* But we don't see that, do we? **"When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick."** When Jesus saw the group of people approaching, he didn't see a mob. He saw people with sad stories, with struggles, sicknesses and feelings of helplessness. His heart was filled with tenderness. He spends the whole day meeting their needs. He preached to them and healed the sick. Finally, at the end of a long and hard day, he turns to his disciples and says: **"They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."**

What would you have said if Jesus had said that to you? There you are, standing in a remote place, with ten to fifteen thousand pairs of eyes looking at you. Where are they going to get food for that many people? There is no Sam's Club; no Costco; and no Walmart. There was no time to get back into that boat that they had sailed on to this solitary place in and catch some fish. Imagine the panic when the disciples heard Jesus say: **"YOU give them something to eat."**

How would you feel if you opened your door to your house tonight and 40% of Franklin is standing in front of your house and Jesus would say to you: **"YOU give them something to eat?"** Really Jesus? I suppose that maybe we could the disciples at least could get a "B" for effort. They knew that they did not have the money to feed all these people even if there was some place to buy it. Then they go through the crowd think that if some people had brought some food along that maybe everyone could share with each other. All these guys can come up with is 5 small loaves of bread and 2 small fish.

Talk about being in a situation that was so far beyond what they could bear. What Jesus was asking them to do was so far pass anything that they could do. Ever feel that way? I'm not just talking about having a bad hair day. No, I'm talking about those times when we just feel overwhelmed. Have you ever wondered how you're going to hold it all together? That smiling face of yours that you put on for people see isn't really that happy at all. If only people would know the pain that you are going through in your life. If only people would know the guilt that you are carrying around on your back. Ever go through those times that you just want to throw your hands up in the air and say: *"What do you expect of me?"*

Jesus wanted them to see that they could not solve the problem that was in front of them. It was hopeless to feed 10 – 15 thousand people. Yet, the solution was standing right there in front of them. Ever go looking all over the house for your keys, and you find them right there in your pocket? Ever gone looking for your sunglasses, only to find them on your head? Think of how many times we think that we can solve our problems? We can't. What happens when we can't? We think that God doesn't care about us anymore. Because if he did, why am I suffering and hurting so much inside?

When I read this account, I wonder. Did God perhaps want his disciples to suddenly feel overwhelmed? Did he want them to suffer some that day looking for food? I think he did. I think that he wanted them to feel like this was more than they could bear. I think Jesus wanted them to sweat a bit? Why? Because he had a solution that was so much greater than anything that they could do. The other Gospel accounts tell us that Jesus already had in mind what he was going to do. He was more than a step ahead of them.

He was about to solve the problem of having no food in a way that no one could have imagined. **“Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves.”** I wonder how the disciples felt when they just keep handing out food and it never runs out? I wonder how they felt when they began to do what Jesus said... **“you give them something to eat?”** I wonder how the crowd felt as they saw this happen. All they had to do is look around. They were out in the middle of nowhere.

Maybe Jesus wanted the people and the disciples and the people on that hillside to suffer a bit. He wanted them to see that HE was the solution. Why? Because when they might face something much worse and over-whelming of a hungry belly, they might remember what Jesus did. When that suffering happens, when we feel overwhelmed, we might trust God to keep his word. We might not just see the problem, but we may see the solution as well.

God will give you more than you can handle so that his great power might be displayed in your life. Indeed, a greater weight of glory is still to come as the Apostle Paul would later write: **“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”** (2 Cor. 4:17-18) May God help us all to do that. Amen.