

Tenth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/A): “
Isaiah 55:1-5; Matthew 14:13-21
August 1-2, 2026
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Familiar story, right? It should be. We hear it every year, in one version or another. The feeding of the multitude is the only miracle story that occurs in all 4 Gospels. The basic story shows up not just 4 times, but 6 times, both as the feeding of the 5,000 **and** the feeding of the 4,000. We could even call it the feeding of the 20,000, since 5,000 was only the head count of men, and we’re told it was more a giant family picnic than a Promise Keepers convention, because it also included women and children.

If a story is **really** familiar, we can be tempted to zone out, like when a loved one launches into a story that’s already been told a zillion times. We do our best to **look** interested, but our mind wanders quickly to other things. One of the Holy Spirit’s jobs is to help us pay attention each time we hear Scripture, though. Our lives evolve, our experiences multiply, and hopefully our understanding increases as time passes. Like any good classic, but moreso, Scripture has different gems to offer the deeper and longer we mine it. Trust that the Holy Spirit has some light to shed on your life through today’s Gospel. Listen to it again, maybe more intently this time, with an ear for what you never noticed before, a heart for the details that most interest or puzzle you. Here is Matthew 14, verses 13-21, from *The Message, The Bible in Contemporary Language* by Eugene Peterson:

13-14 When Jesus got the news, he slipped away by boat to an out-of-the-way place by himself. But unsuccessfully—someone saw him and the word got around. Soon a lot of people from the nearby villages walked around the lake to where he was. When he saw them coming, he was overcome with pity and healed their sick.

¹⁵ Toward evening the disciples approached him. “We’re out in the country and it’s getting late. Dismiss the people so they can go to the villages and get some supper.”

¹⁶ But Jesus said, “There is no need to dismiss them. You give them supper.”

¹⁷ “All we have are five loaves of bread and two fish,” they said.

¹⁸⁻²¹ Jesus said, “Bring them here.” Then he had the people sit on the grass. He took the five loaves and two fish, lifted his face to heaven in prayer, blessed, broke, and gave the bread to the disciples. The disciples then gave the food to the congregation. They all ate their fill. They gathered twelve baskets of leftovers. About five thousand were fed.

What grabs you, speaks to you, makes you wonder?

Here’s where my mind and heart go as I revisit this familiar story.

- 1) **This was not convenient timing for Jesus.** He’s deep in fresh grief, if not shock, over John the Baptist’s beheading. Regardless, Jesus, the Great Physician, pours Himself out **healing** the people, and Jesus, the Good Shepherd, pours Himself out **feeding** the people, even though He is reeling from loss, humanly speaking (and we **do** believe He was fully human as well as fully divine). **There was a soul connection between Jesus and John the Baptist.** Unlike Luke, Matthew doesn’t say anything about them being cousins, but he **does** tell how John prepared the way for Jesus and baptized Jesus. Matthew also describes the imprisonment and death of John the Baptist at some length, including the detail that as soon as John’s disciples recovered and buried his body, they headed off to tell Jesus (not just to share information but also to seek consolation?). Jesus saw a great crowd with great needs and felt great compassion. He was scheduled for some alone time but instinctively set aside His personal plans for the flock’s needs. The reality is: **God’s call for us to serve, to meet our neighbor’s need, often doesn’t**

come at a convenient time for us either. Let's think about it: when's the last time we were willing to tear up our paper calendar or ignore our digital calendar to answer God's insistent call and our neighbor's immediate need? When's the last time we rerouted from our appointed rounds to help somebody else?

- 2) Especially when we read all of chapter 14, which begins with the imprisonment and death of John the Baptist and ends with the feeding of the multitude, we see a series of contrasts between Herod Antipas and Jesus. Herod **fears** the crowd; Jesus has **compassion** on the crowd. Herod throws a decadent birthday bash for his wife; Jesus hosts a huge picnic that hints at a messianic banquet to come. Herod condemns and kills; Jesus cures and saves.
- 3) **"You feed them,"** Jesus says (Matt. 14: 16c), when the disciples point out it's late in the day, people's stomachs are rumbling, and it would be a good idea for Jesus to send them to go find dinner. *"You give them something to eat."* "Lord, ***we have nothing here....*** You're the wonderworker, not us. We are **not** able. Five loaves, two fish: that's a pretty scanty meal, even shared just among us. **But Jesus is insistent.** "Bring [what you have] here to me." (Matt. 14:18b) **Jesus blesses the little they bring and makes it a lot.** How often have we said or acted like, ***"We have nothing.*** We are **not** able." **But Jesus is insistent.** "Bring [what you have] here to me." (Matt. 14:18b) When we obey and humbly offer what seems far too small, **Jesus blesses the little we bring and makes it a lot. God chooses to use what we bring to the table, whether it's bread and wine, sweat and tears, food and furniture, treasure, talent, time.**
- 4) **It's so interesting that God self-limits by choosing to include us** in kingdom work, in becoming an answer to prayer, pushing out evil with good, countering lies with truth,

answering cruelty with compassion, countering heavy despair with holy hope, distrust with faith, hatred with love. I cannot individually feed all the hungry, but together we can prayerfully offer our five loaves and two fish, then witness Jesus blessing the little we bring, multiplying it into a lot. If you want to see that miracle at work, volunteer at the food pantry or the ecumenical giving garden.

The next time we're asked to help in some way and find ourselves thinking, "I'm sorry, it's just not a convenient time," let's remember Jesus pushing aside His grief and pouring compassion on those who needed what He had to give. The next time we see a need and are tempted to believe, "I have nothing to give," let's remember how far Jesus stretched five loaves and two fish. As a person of faith wisely wrote, "Little is always much in the hands of Christ."¹

¹William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. 2, rev. ed. (Daily Study Bible Series, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), p. 102.

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