

Come, listen that you may live.  
Proper 13 Year A  
Matthew 14:13-21

Our Gospel book and Lectionary insert clean up our Gospel reading for today. If you read the reading from the Bible it opens with the words, “Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns.” If you were tuned in at that moment you might have wondered, “Heard WHAT?”- *when Jesus heard what? When the crowd heard what?* Don’t you hate being left out of the loop? I do! If there is something to be heard I want to hear it, it really doesn’t matter if it is pertinent to global issues or even issues in my life, I just want to know. You may be the same way. So I’ll tell you what Jesus had just heard and what the crowd presumably had just heard as well was that John the Baptist had been killed, beheaded, by Herod because his conniving wife and enchanting, but not in a good way, step-daughter had just pulled a number on him. Jesus had just been told, and the gathered crowd heard, that John’s disciples had taken his body and buried it.

And just prior to that really sad news, just after Jesus had told all those parables about what the kingdom of God is like- you remember, a mustard seed, leaven, a pearl of great value, a treasure- just after Jesus told all those parables and warned those listening about what the result would be for the righteous versus the evil, he went home. Before he went home, remember, he

asked the disciples if they understood what he had just said to them and as Scripture tells it they responded, “yes,” and you have to wonder if this is the only lie ever recorded in scripture. Actually, lie may be a bit harsh. They got it on some level, they wanted to get it, but at this moment in time the disciples were probably behaving a bit more like children who have just been scolded by their mom. You’ve been there. We’ve all been there. Remember the tone of voice, maybe with a bit of an edge, “Did you hear me?” and you knew better than to say no, no matter what, so you said “yes” and tried to do your best puzzle solving to determine what she had actually said to avoid any further retribution. Understand, I’m not trying to equate Jesus to a harried Mom here- it just seems that the disciples may have said yes so that Jesus would stop with the kingdom of heaven parables. And we have to admit that while it doesn’t seem that they really had full knowledge at that moment of who Jesus really was, in the end the disciples really did come through. But back to where we are today. Jesus told all those “kingdom is like” parables and then went home, or as Matthew tells it, “he came to his hometown and began to teach people,” and as we know that didn’t go too well. He was unable to do many deeds of power because of the unbelief of the people. They were too busy trying to find flaws. Who does he think he is. Isn’t he that carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother named Mary? *OOOHHH remember? Wasn’t she the one who was pregnant, you know???* How on earth could *he* teach *us*?

And that's the lead up to where we find ourselves today. Jesus has had a tough time in his hometown and then he has learned that his cousin John, the one who did seem to understand who he was and what God's plan was, has been beheaded and it seems no surprise at all that he wants to get away, go away from the crowds. The crowds are not a safe bunch. Sure they want to be healed and God knows they need it, but enough is enough, this does not seem to be going anywhere good. And as we know it doesn't - at least at first glance. Jesus knows that this will lead to his crucifixion it seems that he wants to get away to make peace with that, not to run away, not to hide, but just to take some time. So he goes to "a deserted place." Have you ever been to a deserted place? Maybe you haven't found yourself shipwrecked on an island, but I imagine that at one time in your life or another you have found yourself in a deserted place either physically or emotionally. Those deserted places can be hard places to be. Deserted places are places where you think you are totally alone, that no one has ever been there before, no one can possibly understand where you are what you are going through and even if they did understand they just don't care. Jesus in his full humanity went to that deserted place, and it seems that he went there on an emotional level because he sure wasn't deserted by the people. He was not left physically alone. The disciples were there and there were 5,000 men, not counting women and children as we hear later. This place was at this point not deserted. But it seemed like it. Everybody wanted something and they

wanted it from him. Ever felt that way- like you were being tugged in every direction? It's a deserted place- no cavalry in sight. That's just where Jesus was and the disciples come to him and say "this is a deserted place and the hour is late, send these people away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves" and we would like to think that the disciples were genuinely concerned for the welfare of the people and I'm sure that they were concerned but we also remember the time that they asked Jesus to send the woman away who was badgering them and making a ruckus and we know that they were all frazzled and tired and sad at this point and probably needed what we would call "down time." And Jesus, in typical Jesus form, turns it around on the disciples and says, "You give them something to eat," and we have to give the disciples kudos for not having just shrugged their shoulders, in disbelief and turning to walk away. They had enough faith to at least not do that and what follows is another story of abundance.

We have only five loaves and two fish the disciples told Jesus and at the end of that day there were twelve baskets left over- twelve being the number of the tribes of Israel. Jesus blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowd. This is an obvious forerunner to the Eucharist and this, like the parables about the kingdom that we heard last week, is about abundance. It is also about fulfillment and calling the disciples to take part in the continuation of the plan. Jesus here meets a

very real need. The people are in a place where there are no markets; there is no food available. They are growing hungry and this will soon be a problem. The disciples see the problem looming and turn it over to Jesus and what does Jesus do, but turn it back over to them. He says, “you give them something to eat,” but he doesn’t say that and then turn and walk away to have his well-deserved down-time. He says ‘You give them something to eat’ and then he makes it possible. There is something to that. He told them what to do. They grumbled and came up with all kinds of reasons why it wouldn’t work but then they turned it over to him, followed his direction and the people were fed in a very real way. I imagine that if we had Sterling Henderson here from Grace Mission today she could tell us how this story of the loaves and fishes occurs on a daily basis. I’m sure that many of you have seen it in your own lives. You find yourself in a deserted place and are not sure how it is ever going to work out and as a seemingly last resort (and that’s the backwards part) you turn it over to Jesus, to God, and you find out that you had what you needed all along- faith-trust that Jesus would provide what you need to get you through that moment. He provided food for the five thousand that day and he provides food for us today.

The prophesy of Isaiah heralds this very thing: “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your

money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy” Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me: listen, so that you may live.” More good news for those who are listening!

Listen, so that you may live. All are invited to join at the banquet of the Lord’s table to be filled with the Spiritual food of the most precious body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ and then to go out and feed those who hunger.

Come, listen that you may live. Amen.