

MESSAGE – The Heart of Our Savior

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The story of the feeding of the 4 or 5 thousand people. You've probably heard it before. Did you know that it is the only miracle story that is in all 4 of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John)? There's so much we could cover with this story:

- Try to delve the mystery of miracles. Find an explanation for how it happened.
- Contemplate the enormity of the crowd size....
- Reflect on the symbolism of fish and bread or the symbolism of the amount of leftovers

Maybe for another day. Today, I invite us to look at the story from an angle different from these. So let's listen once again to a familiar story as written in Matthew's Gospel. Chapter 14:13-21. Hear this word of the Lord

¹³When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

¹⁵As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

¹⁶Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

¹⁷"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.

¹⁸"Bring them here to me," he said. ¹⁹And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken

pieces that were left over. ²¹ The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

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Let me re-read the first part of the opening verse here: “When Jesus heard what had happened.” What did Jesus hear about? Well, the news had just been delivered to him about the death of his cousin, John the Baptist. I can imagine the compound amount of feelings Jesus must have been feeling.

- Grief – at the loss of not only his cousin, but the forerunner of his own ministry....
- Anger – at the injustice of John’s death or shall I say murder by Herod?
- Perhaps anxiety – are they coming for Jesus next?

And the story goes that he went and withdrew in a boat to be by himself. To sort it all out. To pray. To cry. Pretty healthy response I would say.

So imagine the people he is leaving. Maybe they watch him go. Maybe they share the word – “yes we saw him and we think he’s heading to....” And so people hustle along to meet him. His presence and energy must be so life-giving that he is probably constantly sought out. It is probably so exhausting for him.

But when he lands, and sees the people, the story reports that he had compassion on them. It is that line that has completely moved my heart.

- Despite his own experience of brokenness, he still has compassion for others.
- This is the heart of the Savior!
- This is the heart of our Lord!

Now some people might argue and say that Jesus isn't exhibiting or practicing good boundaries and self-care. That he isn't taking care of himself first.....I don't know.

If that is what we see, then does that mean that we should only have compassion, that we only reach out, when we have all our ducks in a row? If that were the case, then nobody would ever be able to help anybody in anything at any time.

But maybe Jesus is illustrating something else for us.

That ministry goes on.

That bad news and set backs don't stop the kingdom movement.

That our brokenness isn't a stopping point.

And maybe even that our healing comes from helping.

See, Jesus – in continuing the ministry that John the Baptist had heralded – he is actually not letting Herod retain control.

- In continuing ministry – Jesus is claiming a victory over Herod's act of force.
- In continuing ministry – Jesus is exhibiting that his kingdom/the God reality in the world cannot be stopped, hampered, nor hindered.
- In continuing ministry, it means that no political or social force can put an end to what God is doing in the world. Yes, Jesus is heart-broken with John's death, but he keeps moving on in ministry and thus claims a victory over what Herod has tried to do.

And then he invites his disciples to practice this very thing.

The disciples find themselves in a place of "not enough". In this case,

- there's not enough food.
- Thousands of people.
- It's a deserted place.
- It's getting late.

And they know that people need to be given direction to leave. And Jesus needs to give them that direction, otherwise they won't leave.

Maybe the disciples are hungry themselves and they know they only have enough food for half a fish taco a piece. And they don't want to eat in front of others. So they are doing the compassionate thing right?

"Jesus send them away to get some food."

And Jesus says, "you give them something to eat"

And they show him the limited resources.... There is obviously insufficient resources for the need.

And right then and there Jesus teaches them that when you keep doing the kingdom's work...God makes a way.

Jesus experienced it: God sustained Jesus through the day

And those disciples experienced it: for God made a way for all those people to be fed.

The kingdom's work wins again.

Friends, these are tough days.

I was having coffee with a colleague this week and he said, "these are dark days" then he corrected himself "these are fragile days". I think he's right.

- We feel that fragility like Jesus did when his heart was broken.
- We feel that fragility like the disciples did when they faced scarcity.
- We feel that fragility as we struggle with hard choices ahead of us about school and work.
- We feel that fragility as we wrestle with our disagreements over COVID and politics.
- We feel that fragility as we watch unemployment numbers increase.

The days are fragile.

Jesus knows.

And his heart is with us.

Let us keep our hearts with Jesus and with each other.

So let us keep doing the kingdom's work and not settle for what could be a victory over us, but strive for the kingdom's reality over all our circumstances.