



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

July 12, 2020

Abundance

Rev. Louise Rogers

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Matthew 14:13-21

¹³Now 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. ¹⁴When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. ¹⁵When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." ¹⁶Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." ¹⁷They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." ¹⁸And he said, "Bring them here to me." ¹⁹Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. ²¹And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

A man in a van stopped to fill up the gas tank. He had a van full of restless rowdy kids. The guy at the pump next to him called out, "Are these all your kids or are you on a picnic?" He answered "Yes, these are my kids and NO, it's not a picnic! Here we are at the peak of summer but it's safe to say, our lives have not exactly been a picnic either. The corona virus has shut down all aspects of our live including our coming together. Unused concert tickets sit at home on the dresser, swimming pools are empty, PNC Park is quiet, not to mention family reunions and picnics are on hold all for our collective health.

We are social beings. People love to get together for all kinds of reasons, true in the days of Jesus and true today. In today's scripture, the crowd assembled outdoors in Galilee, on the hillside in the early spring, sitting on the green grass, eating bread and fish with hopes to see the Lord. Life was sure no picnic for them. Just as it is today, they came weighed down by many things, some were sick; others were hungry all were empty looking to Jesus to heal them. They came desperately, desperately to see what Jesus would do for them.

Last weekend Bill and I watched a very good movie, *The Two Popes*, the true story of Pope Francis and Pope Benedict XVI. These two great figures of the Catholic Church are portrayed in giving and receiving mercy and forgiveness. One particularly poignant scene came toward the end of the movie, Pope Francis is getting ready to leave and he opens an ordinary door in the chapel to discover hundreds of people milling around. Pope Francis is shocked to see hundreds of tourists milling around in the hallways just on the other side of the door, close to the Pope. He slams the door and announces that he will call security and have the people removed. Pope Benedict, having come to terms with his human side, says no, "they have waited their entire

lives to see me” as he proceeded through the door. The shocked crowds of people swarmed around Pope Benedict and begin to take selfies. Pope Francis steps back and watches like the disciples did with Jesus greeting the crowd on the hillside in Galilee realizing it’s not the details of the arrangements that matters it is their souls.

While the disciples and Pope Francis focused on the practical, Jesus touches our souls. The disciples thought they were being so proactive taking care of the crowd late in the day. Imagine the disciples response when Jesus says, **You give them something to eat.** In that moment Jesus defines for us what discipleship truly means: an invitation to action and involvement, discipleship is not just about following but participating. In other words, you do it. In that one simple statement, Jesus is saying to his disciples, “Live already. You can’t sit back and watch me do all this awesome stuff. Live it. Live life. I am counting on you. I need you.”

Here we are in this “new normal.” Now we are called to living fully and extraordinary, called to new places of going and connecting. caring and moving about. How will this time inform our faith? Rev. James Forsyth, senior pastor of McLean Presbyterian Church in Virginia ponders this for us, “Worship, community and missions look very different in this time. But they are all geared toward accomplishing the same ends as before — bring the hope and healing of Jesus to our own souls and to a world in need. In other words, the vision remains unchanged, but the methods have adapted.”

Here at Westminster Church we have had to move forward, adapt as disciples in new and active ways. Since March when the doors closed new ways we have been serving in new and exciting ways:

- Foods to Go- We literally have gathered food at the Pentecost offering and through your donations to feed children in Pittsburgh this summer. Over 6,000 bags of food are being sent to the kids in Pittsburgh from Westminster Church.
- Donations of over \$ 7,000 above the regular contributions were made to SHIM for an emergency food contribution to their food pantry
- Deacons served boxed dinners to hungry people lined up on the sidewalk in Brookline.
- Spiritual hunger is met with virtual worship and streamed services every Sunday.
- Prayer vigil invited 48 prayers in our congregation to pray for our world specifically on matters of justice.
- Youth groups are meeting in the parking lot and on Zoom meetings.

Each one of us has a gift, a talent, a skill, a passion and way to love and connect with others.

Following Jesus is discovering your voice in the chorus, your place in the parade, your unique way to serve. You give them something to eat. Those words may be startling to hear especially when we are dealing with our own stuff. Taking on a new way to care for others or to reach out to others can be hard or even frightening, Aquinas says, "To love well in the face of fear is to be courageous. Courage is not the opposite of fear. to stand firm and do what love requires." Love can bring about new possibilities because love is of God.

We hear the final outcome of the miracle of the loaves and fishes but the details are missing. Did the baskets suddenly fill up with mackerel and pita? Did the fish suddenly jump out of the sea into the baskets? Or, as some scholars suggest, did the picnic goers, upon seeing the boy offering his loaves and fishes, begin to share their own provisions? They opened up their own baskets and offered their own food to others, so that in the end everyone had enough in abundance? When the creative gifts are shared amazing ministry happened, hearts are restored, loved is found and community is served whether on the hillside in Galilee or in the south hills of Pittsburgh. We can go forwardly with confidence as God's grace meets us all in abundance.



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