

Wednesday, March 15, 2023
Season of Lent
Day 19

Matthew 14:13–21

¹³ When 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. ¹⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

¹⁵ As 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.”

¹⁶ Jesus 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. ¹⁹ And 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. ²⁰ They 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.

Reflection

When Jesus hears that his cousin John has been killed by Herod, he goes back into a wilderness place (not necessarily geographic). This is a part of his routine. It is in the wilderness that Jesus’s identity is re-inscribed and he sorts through temptations. The solitary times are necessary for the public ministry times. This is a good reminder for us, especially when ministry gets overwhelming! Of course, the demands of ministry just keep coming.

I think this forms a nice context for what happens next; the disciples, whom Jesus has made apostles, share his load. They come to him and suggest that it's time for the people to be sent so they can eat. Jesus is NOT critical when he says that the crowds don't need to go away to eat, because the disciples are able to feed them. Not only do they share Jesus's authority to forgive, heal, and exorcise; they share his ability to feed the people (Exodus motif in the wilderness).

Sure enough, the fish and bread are distributed through the hands of the disciples to the people. Men, women and children fed and ready to enter the kingdom of God. Notice the chain: the Father (looked to heaven), to Jesus who is empowered by the Spirit, to disciples, to the people. Twelve baskets of left over is significant too, as that mirrors the tribes of Israel and the apostles. This must have been such an encouragement to Jesus who had just lost one ministry partner, but discovered 12 more.

This is a good reminder for us too, as we travel through Lent. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Life Together* says, we must have days alone and together as part of our discipleship. We cannot derive our identity from the community, only God. But, we cannot live our identity alone, only in the midst of community.

Prayer

Lord, help us at the times that we feel overwhelmed and tired. Take us into yourself and sing our identity over us again: we are your children. And, grant to us those who will share the burden of ministry and the Christian life too. Help us to establish good rhythms of rest and work. Amen.