

Monday, March 20, 2023  
Season of Lent  
Day 23

### **Matthew 15:29–39**

<sup>29</sup> Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down. <sup>30</sup> Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. <sup>31</sup> The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.

<sup>32</sup> Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.”

<sup>33</sup> His disciples answered, “Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?”

<sup>34</sup> “How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked.

“Seven,” they replied, “and a few small fish.”

<sup>35</sup> He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. <sup>36</sup> Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people. <sup>37</sup> They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. <sup>38</sup> The number of those who ate was four thousand men, besides women and children. <sup>39</sup> After Jesus had sent the crowd away, he got into the boat and went to the vicinity of Magadan.

### **Reflection**

The feeding of the 4,000+ comes after the feeding of the 5,000+, so it could be asked why the disciples are not prepared to exercise the power they have been given to feed this crowd. If so, this would be about a certain lack of faith on the disciples’s part. That is how it reads in Mark’s Gospel. But, Matthew has a different emphasis.

Jesus has not abandoned his mission to Israel, but he is living out the Syrophenician Woman’s phrase. The kingdom of God that is present in Jesus for Israel is also overflowing to the nations. That’s why verse 31 concludes that the crowds praised the God of Israel. So, what we have here are 4,000+ non-Jewish people who have been with Jesus and he wants to feed them.

That puts the disciples’s doubt into a new light. Perhaps the question isn’t if they can do it, but should they do it? How far can the kingdom of God (Israel) extend to non-Jewish people? It was accepted that to have table fellowship with someone was to accept them. That’s why Jesus was so criticized for eating with prostitutes, tax collectors, and sinners. Jesus uses the enacted parable of feeding to answer the implied question. The kingdom is also fully for Gentiles as Gentiles; they do not need to become Jewish first. This may also be the significance of the number 4,000, as 4 is the number of the earth (four corners, four winds, etc). It may also explain the significance of the 7 baskets-full of leftovers; 7 is a complete number (7 days of creation).

It is generally understood that Matthew’s Gospel was written for mainly Jewish Christians, possibly centred in Jerusalem, focusing on living out the Law under Christ. This would be a significant episode as they considered to what degree they could have fellowship with non-Jewish Christians. The answer is that they could and should have total fellowship: one table, not two.

I believe that this narrative helps us as evangelicals to go to places (have fellowship) that we are not comfortable with. To build relationships with our neighbours for the sake of the kingdom (which is to say, for their sake). To so associate with “outsiders” to such a degree that their shame becomes ours, without us participating in or blessing sin. In short, our call is to extend the kingdom invitation to all no matter who.

### **Prayer**

Lord, forgive us for our holy huddles where we try to keep ourselves pure from a world hungry for you. Give us courage and power (of the Spirit, not the world) to go to all. Amen.