

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, AUGUST 2, 2020

First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(from Psalm 145)*

One: Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised.
All: **I will ponder the glorious splendor of your majesty
and speak of the might of your wondrous acts.**
One: The Lord is gracious and full of compassion,
slow to anger and of great kindness.
All: **O Lord, you are loving to everyone,
and your compassion is over all your works.**
One: All your works praise you, O Lord.
All: **They make known the glory of your reign.**
One: O Lord, you are faithful in all your words
and merciful in all your deeds.
All: **The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord,
and you give them their food in due season
and satisfy the needs of every living creature.**
One: O Lord, you are righteous in all your ways
and loving in all your works.
All: **My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord.**

***OPENING HYMN** "O Lord My God" GtG 625 *(Verses 1-3)*

1. **O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
consider all the worlds thy hands have made,
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
thy power throughout the universe displayed:**

Refrain:

**Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee:
How great thou art! How great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee:
How great thou art! How great thou art!**

2. **When through the woods and forest glades I wander
and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees,
when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze:**

(Refrain)

3. **And when I think that God, his Son not sparing,
sent him to die, I scarce can take it in,
that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
he bled and died to take away my sin:**

(Refrain)

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION** *(based on Psalm 145)*

Lord, we confess that you uphold all who are falling, raising up those who are bowed down. You give good things to all your creatures in due season. You are just in all your ways and kind in all your doings. Be near to us, Lord, as we call upon you, asking your forgiveness for what we have done and what we have left undone. Hear our cry, and save us, Father of all. Watch over us in love. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: The God of steadfast love is our refuge and Savior.
In Christ, we who are broken
are healed, forgiven, filled, and transformed.

All: **Alleluia! Amen.**

***THE PEACE**

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

All: **And also with you.**

(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)

THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READING Matthew 14:13-21

MATTHEW 14:13-21 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹³ 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. ¹⁴ When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them

and cured their sick. ¹⁵ When 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." ¹⁶ Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." ¹⁷ They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." ¹⁸ And he said, "Bring them here to me." ¹⁹ Then 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. ²⁰ And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. ²¹ And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "How To Give ... and Abundantly" by Pastor Bill Vincent

No. This is not a sermon on stewardship. Yes, we think of stewardship in terms of giving. And in our more enlightened moments, we even think of that giving as not only including money but also the abilities and natural talents and interests that we have, too: giving of the time that we have, and of our energy. And so we broaden our understanding of stewardship ... in our more enlightened moments. And since giving -- and not only giving but giving abundantly -- is the title of the sermon, this might have led you to conclude that this sermon is about stewardship.

But that is not the case ... even though what I have to say has implications for our stewardship.

No. This is not a sermon on world hunger. The passage recalls for us the miracle of the feeding of thousands of hungry people. There are thousands and even millions of hungry people in our world today. The issue of world hunger is brought to our attention by pictures of refugee camps, lines at food pantries, 'food deserts', projects like CROP walks. Churches, and governments address the issue in their own sundry ways. And still there are millions of people hungry in this world right this very minute. With such a need pressing in upon us daily, and a passage that talks about feeding hungry people, it would not be hard to conclude that this sermon is to be about world hunger.

But that is not the case ... even though what I have to say has implications for world hunger and how we address that issue.

No. This sermon is not about communion. Today IS communion Sunday, and we will gather at the table shortly. Even as we read the passage for today, we are reminded of the sacrament. The words used to describe Jesus' actions as he prepares and passes out the food are reminiscent of the Last Supper: he "took ... blessed ... broke ... gave.". And I can understand how the gospel writer might have looked back through the lens of that experience of the Last Supper and interpreted the feeding of the 5000 in light of that later event. So it is easy to see how this sermon might be about communion.

But that is not the case ... even though what I have to say has implications for our celebration and understanding of communion.

No. This sermon is not about stewardship or world hunger or communion.

What this sermon is about is multiplication. That's right: multiplication.

Not the kind of multiplication that we may remember from school with tables that tell us that 2×2 is 4, and 2×3 is 6, and 2×4 is 8, and 2×5 is 10, and on and on and on.

This sermon is about a different kind of multiplication: a divine multiplication; a new math, yet a math that is as old as the hills.

According to Matthew, Jesus was healing those in the crowd who were sick.

It is late in the day. The disciples come to Jesus and suggest that he send the people away so that they might go into the villages and towns in the area and buy food for themselves.

But Jesus shifts the responsibility onto the shoulders of the disciples:

"You give them something to eat."

The disciples object, as well they should. For they only had 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. And the number of people was far, far more than could be fed by such a skimpy picnic basket.

Yet, in spite of the disciples' objections, the crowd is eventually fed. We don't know how. Suggestions have been made that run the gamut from the "oh, so practical" to approaching the absurd.

Some, not satisfied with a miraculous explanation, have suggested that people were so amazed at what was happening that they only ate a couple of crumbs and were satisfied with a small amount. Somehow they weren't thinking that much about food and therefore didn't need much to be satisfied.

In the gospel of John, which also records this event, we read that there was a small boy who had the five loaves and two fish. In light of this, some have suggested that when others saw the generosity of this young boy, they pulled out from hiding the food that they had. So that what happened was that people began to share what they had with those around them, and that from this spontaneous potluck supper, all ended up being satisfied and having their fill.

Then, of course, there is the simple answer: that what happened was, pure and simply, a miracle.

But the fact of the matter is that we don't really know exactly how it happened. And what's more, I'm not sure it matters all that much.

The gospel writer tells us this story not to engage our minds in a quest for a solution to a puzzle.

He tells it for a different reason.

"You give them something to eat,"

Jesus said to the disciples.

"We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish,"

they replied.

"Bring them here to me,"

Jesus said.

"Bring them here to me."

Jesus challenged the disciples.

"You give them something to eat."

But they balk at such a suggestion. The resources they have are simply not adequate for the task. They have not the wherewithall to answer the challenge.

And that is precisely the point: they do not.

But then Jesus says,

"Bring them here to me."

"Bring them here to me." On their own, the disciples were indeed inadequate for the task. The challenge was too great ... if they relied solely on their own resources.

Yet here was this man Jesus there before them. A man who had demonstrated his power by healing paralytics, the blind, and those filled with demons. A man who had astonished the crowds

at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes. (Matthew 7:28b-29)

A man who had commanded the wind and waves ... and they obeyed him.

Yes, the resources of the disciples were indeed inadequate for the task of feeding so many hungry people.

But Jesus said,

"Bring them here to me."

And he blessed what they brought, gave it back to the disciples, and the disciples gave it to the crowd.

And all ate and were filled.

The disciples would have floundered had they attempted to meet the need of the people on their own. But when their efforts and resources were empowered by and channeled through this man Jesus, their efforts were transformed, their resources took on new proportions.

Suddenly what they had to offer was not only enough, it was more than enough, for

they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full.

Divine mathematics: when 5 loaves and 2 fish equal 5000 fed.

Who would have thought that a lanky, high-school-aged boy could defeat in a fair fight an opponent 8-feet tall with the muscles of Mr. Universe? Yet with divine mathematics, David slew Goliath.

Who would have thought that an outcast -- with a criminal record, no less -- could lead a motley band of enslaved people against the mightiest empire on earth ... and win? Yet with divine mathematics, Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and into freedom.

Divine mathematics: it's the reason Paul can say,

I can do all things through the one who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)

It's the reason Jesus himself can say,

"For mortals it...is impossible, but...for God all things are possible." (Mark 10:27)

Jesus makes the same point using different words when he says to his disciples,

"I am the vine, you are the branches. ... apart from me you can do nothing. ... Abide in me as I abide in you." (John 15:5 & 4)

Apart from him we can do nothing. Yet by abiding in him -- by remaining in his presence and offering all that we have and all that we are to him -- we will bear much fruit. We will bear fruit in abundance.

That's divine mathematics, the multiplication of the kingdom of God. It is that surprise we experience when we bring all that we have -- which may seem like so little -- and, by grace, God multiplies our efforts to do great things far beyond our imagining.

Yes, the challenges before us are great: another million people added to the unemployment list.

Yes, the challenges before us are great: 400 plus years of history and narrative that so surround us and entangle us that most of the time we don't even see how it skews our vision of ourselves and warps our view of those who happen to look different from us.

Yes, the challenges before us are great.

And we can feel overwhelmed. 'What can we/I do? Send the need away!'

But not on Jesus' watch: **"You give them something to eat,"** he says.

-You offer a helping hand.

-You face up to an uncomfortable legacy.

-You confess.

-You do something.

-You put forth effort.

-You try.

Will we do what we can?

Will we offer what we can?

Not simply the bare minimum just to get by.

But do our best, give our all, give of ourselves, even when it seems like no more than a drop in the bucket (if that much).

And trust -- have a little faith -- in the one who says, **"Bring them here to me"?**

Laura Brooking Lewis notes,

There's a curious economy about the way God works -- bringing much from little, more than enough from less, something where not much was before. Often, we remark on this preference of God's for working in weakness to emphasize the wonder of God's power. That insight is certainly not to be ignored, but somewhere alongside it belongs a new awareness of the possibilities of our hopelessly small gifts and the limited time and energy of which we despair, when placed at God's disposal.

When we focus on that One who does not look askance at limitations, but actually uses such to bring wholeness and hope, then the opportunities we may find in crisis are multiplied. (Laura Brooking Lewis, *The Presbyterian Outlook*)

And our hope too.

"Bring them here to me," Jesus said.

Bring whatever it is we have to Christ, no matter how small the offering, no matter how seemingly insignificant the gift. But bring what we have and who we are. For God in Christ can multiply that gift and do great things for the advancement of the kingdom: great endings from small beginnings, great accomplishments from small expectations. For God has the power to use what we offer and expand its influence far beyond our imagining: like the tiny mustard seed which produces a huge bush; like the seed which grows and bears fruit a hundredfold; like the leaven which causes the entire loaf to rise.

So, though this sermon is not on stewardship per se, the message of this passage speaks to us and our stewardship. For God can multiply our offering, be it 5 loaves and 2 fish; be it a singing voice; be it a willingness to learn and grow; be it a time to listen, a green thumb, a love of learning. Whatever we have to offer, it may seem so small, we have but to offer it. We have but to offer ourselves. And God will indeed receive our gifts and multiply our efforts, increase our offerings by leaps and bounds. For that is the mathematics, the multiplication, of the kingdom.

So, though this sermon is not on world hunger per se, the message of this passage speaks to us and world hunger. For though the issue seems so large and we seem so small, we can have confidence that God can and will multiply the effects of our efforts to make a difference in the lives of the thousands, even millions, for whom world hunger is a daily issue of life and death. We need but to offer what we have, to offer ourselves. And God will receive our gifts, and multiply our efforts. For that is the mathematics, the multiplication, of the kingdom.

And though this sermon is not on communion per se, the message of this passage speaks to us and to our understanding of communion. For though it be only bread and grape juice that we share, we believe that God blesses these moments together to provide sustenance for our very lives. The elements may be mere morsels that we consume, yet by offering ourselves and this time together to God, we can be satisfied by these mere morsels and nourished in our very souls. For that is the mathematics, the multiplication, of the kingdom.

"Bring them here to me," Jesus says. Whatever we have to offer, bring it here to him.

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** *(The Apostles' Creed)*

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

(Today's version of the Apostles' Creed is reprinted by permission from Book of Common Worship, copyright 1993 Westminster/John Knox Press.)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastor: O Lord, attend to our cry...
People: ...give ear to our prayer.

THE EUCHARIST

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

O Lord, as you multiplied the fish beyond the vision of the apostles to feed the multitudes, we pray you will multiply us in our discipleship so that your love might be proclaimed to the ends of the earth. These things we pray in your name. Amen.

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Invitation to the Lord's Table

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Leader: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them to the Lord.

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

(The prayer continues...)

The Lord's Prayer (Contemporary)

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

**Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

Communion of the People

(Please hold the bread so that we might partake of it together, to remind us of our participation in this sacrament as a community. Please drink the cup as you are served, reminding us of our individual participation in this sacrament and our personal commitment to our Lord.)

Prayer

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Take Thou Our Minds, Dear Lord” GtG 707

1. **Take thou our minds, dear Lord, we humbly pray;
give us the mind of Christ each passing day;
teach us to know the truth that sets us free;
grant us in all our thoughts to honor thee.**

2. **Take thou our hearts, O Christ, they are thine own;
come thou within our souls and claim thy throne;
help us to shed abroad thy deathless love;
use us to make the earth like heaven above.**

3. **Take thou our wills, Most High! Hold thou full sway;
have in our inmost souls thy perfect way;
guard thou each sacred hour from selfish ease;
guide thou our ordered lives as thou dost please.**

4. **Take thou ourselves, O Lord, heart, mind, and will;
through our surrendered souls thy plans fulfill.
We yield ourselves to thee: time, talents, all;
we hear, and henceforth heed, thy sovereign call.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

Pastor: ...And let the gathered people of God say...
People: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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