

7th Sunday Pentecost A Lect 18 11

July 31, 2011

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.
Amen.

This last week the youth at camp learned about who Jesus is..., who Jesus is as the Son of God, as healer, teacher, Savior and friend. While I came home tired and ready to sleep in my own bed, camp is always a fun and exciting trip. I know there will be frustrations as well as unexpected joys during the week. This year like many years, almost half of our campers were friends of our members and some of them have little connection with a church or a place where Jesus is talked about on a regular basis. My hope the same each year that camp might become the spark that lights a fire within them to learn more about who Jesus is for them.

During our Friday teaching time I asked the older campers that Abigail and I were teaching to share who Jesus is for them and how what they learned this week made a difference for them. Most of the youth in their shyness of answering questions responded with Jesus is my friend. But a couple of them were brave enough to comment that Jesus was not only their friend, but he was because Jesus was there to listen to them when no one else could. But all of them in an indirect way indicated they knew and understood that Jesus / God loved them a lot and that was why Jesus was always there for them.

I also challenged them as we left to think about how they might take one thing home with them they would share with someone else. Maybe it was a one of the stories we studied, one of the themes of the day, one of the Bible verses or even a song. Because like the rest of us they live among people who have little connection to the church, little knowledge of who Jesus is, and even less understanding of the love and compassion God has for us his children.

The writer of the Gospel of Matthew, continues to lift up the love and compassionate side of Jesus on his journey toward Jerusalem. In our reading for today Jesus is grieving the death of his friend and cousin, John the Baptist. It is the news of John's death that prompts Jesus to head out to the countryside, to the deserted place to be alone with his disciples to deal with his grief. Yet by this point in his ministry Jesus had become well known in the area as a great healer, teacher, and miracle worker. So the towns folks and people from the area continued to keep track of his movements so they could come and be with him.

So once again as Jesus tried to get away to have time for himself, to grieve privately alone in a deserted place, the crowds were having none of it. So they watched him leave, news spread about the direction he was headed and soon Jesus and the disciples were joined by scores of others wanting to get close to this great man. Then the writer says, 'when Jesus saw the great crowds he had great compassion on them and healed all of them.'

While I do not remember much of my Greek classes in seminary, the word for compassion is one of them. It comes from the word that is used to talk about that place deep within you. It is that feeling that starts way down in your gut and it is so powerful that it is hard for you to ignore. It is that feeling that drives you to action, because you can do nothing else.

So it is not surprising when the disciples come up to Jesus as the crowds continue to push closer to be touched or healed that the disciples said, 'send them away.' In the eyes of the disciples here was an impossible situation. Here were thousands upon thousands of people in a deserted place with no vendors, no food source, and no possible way to feed the throngs of hungry people who had gathered around Jesus.

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To which Jesus responds with, 'they do not need to go away, you give them something to eat.' Now the disciples are really puzzled and confused. 'We have nothing to give them' they tell Jesus, 'except two fish and a five loaves of bread.' Jesus asks them to bring him the food and ask the people to sit down. Jesus taking the food, raising it up in thanksgiving to God, blesses it then breaks the fish and bread and putting them in baskets. Handing the baskets to the disciples he sends them out to share it with all who had gathered. After everyone had eaten their fill, the disciples return each carrying a full basket of food left over.

Jesus only offered thanks, blessing and breaking the bread into baskets, it was the disciples who went out and served and who provided the thousands of people with food to eat. Jesus did not just make food appear in the midst of the circles of friends and neighbors sitting on the grass in that deserted place. Jesus used the hands and the feet of the disciples to provide, Jesus gave each of them a basket with more than enough to feed the people they were sent to. So much so that each returned with more than they began with.

One of the reasons I am grateful to all of you here at First English is the way you support the youth to go to camp or on mission trips. It helps them and the adults who go understand we live in a diverse world and not everyone lives the way we do. A few weeks ago as I talked about the parable of the weed and the wheat I talked about how growing up we had a large garden. There were times in my youth that my parents struggled especially during a couple years when my father did not have a steady job. It was the food we grew in the summer that allowed us to good food to eat all year long.

It took me years and a couple of mission trips as a youth to come to understand that even as poor as my family was, we were blessed and lived with abundance. Not everyone has the money to purchase the seed or good ground to plant it in. It took time to understand why my parents would give away those fruits and vegetables we worked hard to raise. Now I also better understand the compassion my parents had for the family and friends around us who were also in need. We were blessed with abundance and God was using them to help others have what they would have not only what they needed for life but to be able to live as well.

Those same feelings and compassion have been welling up inside Debbie and I as we watched the news the last couple of days. We have been moved with compassion and a desire to do something for those suffering with the famine conditions half way around the world. I know first come the doubts often have upon seeing reports like thinking 'what can I do?' Then we hear today's Gospel, reminding us that with our meager yet sufficient resources God in Christ is asking us to do something, to take the basket he has handed us then to go out feed them.

I am not naïve and understand even with my greatest desire to offer my assistance to those people, that there are regional and global political barriers that will need to be overcome. But I also know that power of compassion, the work of love and the faith that we have the ability to move mountains when we need to.

Jesus tells us we do not need to send them away and ignore the problem. God takes what little we have, blesses what we have to offer and returns it to us so we might go to provide for the needs of others. We have been blessed to be a blessing to others, Jesus provides us with the resources we need to accomplish the tasks we have been given and he does so with abundance.

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AMEN

T.G.B.T.G.

Pastor Michael