

More Than Enough, From Next to Nothing

By: Karen Scherer

August 2, 2020. Guest pastor Karen Scherer preaches today on the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand. Even though they had next to nothing, the crowd all ate and were filled, because Jesus can turn "next to nothing" into more than enough.

Reading: [Matthew 14:13-21](#)

*** Transcript ***

"Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself." We can only imagine Jesus' grief and his mourning over the news of John the Baptist's murder at the hands of Herodias and her daughter. John, who was his cousin. John, who had baptized him in the Jordan. John, who had proclaimed repentance and the coming of the kingdom of Heaven, whose proclamation Jesus had picked up when John was arrested. And if John's death wasn't enough, this difficult news was piled on top of the hurt that he must have felt at having been rejected in his own hometown of Nazareth, just before hearing of John's terrible death. So Jesus withdrew to actually a wilderness place — an isolated place — to be alone, to grieve, to mourn, to pray. And when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. They too must have just heard the news regarding John. And just as Jesus, their sojourn may have been an act of grief, or bewilderment, or something else desperate enough for them to end up in a wilderness place with no food, on that hillside far away.

We too may know of such feelings of grief and bewilderment. We are at a particular turmoil in our country. Black lives are clamoring for justice, and white lives are just beginning to understand. Asylum seekers, even children, are being imprisoned, detained. Unknown or unmarked federal law enforcement personnel are snatching citizens from the streets and driving them off in unmarked vans. The backdrop of this turmoil is a pandemic that has caused fear, closed businesses, created massive job losses, and tempts us to make mask wearing a political statement. The world seems to be in chaos. We may not recognize where we are anymore, but I'll tell you it's some kind of wilderness.

When Jesus went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them and cured the sick. Jesus sees them and he sees us. He not only sees those who are sick and infirm. He sees in the crowd their dispirited, heartbroken pain. Herod's act of killing John was just the final straw for some of these folks. Roman occupation, oppression, corruption. Too big to overthrow, too cruel to endure. "What is left?" they must have been thinking. Jesus' reaction to seeing them is a physical one, one that the English word "compassion" does not do justice to. He was gut-wrenched when he saw the crowd. And so he goes to them, and he goes among them. And he begins healing them, raising their spirits, healing their broken hearts, curing their infirmities.

D. Mark Davis has a great blog spot called *Left Behind and Loving It*. And he writes this: "A revolutionary leader, like a zealot, could have used this moment to rally troops. Five thousand men, plus women and children, in one place — angry or bewildered or dispirited over the death of John the Baptizer — would make a great start to an army that could have stormed Herod's palace. Instead it becomes a feeding story, a healing story."

Well truth be told, in these current times I find myself much of the time feeling much more like a zealot than a disciple. I find myself feeling angry and sad and anxious. And if you're like me, after many gut-wrenching hours swiping through our social media feeds, we have not seen much cause for hope.

Divisions increase. Memes plant seeds of irrational bias. And resigned, depressed, left without hope or otherwise spiritually impoverished, many wonder what hope do we have. In our secular society, where do we look for deliverance? We look to our government, our courts, our church's leadership. But no person or institution can be granted universal moral authority. All such authorities in fact have been systematically eliminated. We disagree on what is fact and what is truth today. So we find ourselves just wanting it to all go away.

When it was evening, the disciples came to Jesus 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." The disciples just want to send them away. And I suspect that they too just wanted to hunker down with Jesus. And besides, there was nothing they had to give them. Jesus said to them, "They need not go away. The location of abundance is here — in here, in the heart — not elsewhere. They need not go away. You give them something to eat." And they replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." Ah, the response of scarcity. We just have a couple of fish sandwiches. What are we going to do with fish sandwiches? And he said to them, "Bring them here. Bring them to me." And then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass ("ordered" meaning more invitation). "I've got something. I've got a plan. I've got something to give you." And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples. And the disciples gave them to the crowds, and all ate and were filled. And they took up what was left out of the broken pieces: twelve baskets full.

Where do we look for deliverance? What hope do we have? Not in miracles from on high, no. But in the presence of God with us. We disciples may look around and believe that we are out of earthly possibilities. Except that God has inhabited the stuff of this earth. God has come to us in flesh and blood, in bread and wine, in water and word. God has claimed us at baptism. Blessed and broken and shared, Jesus not only offers us bread, but his very life, his presence, his compassion, his promise with us now. "This is my body and blood given for you." For nourishment, for healing, for freedom to act. God has promised that no devil, no ruler, no mob, no injustice, nothing in all creation will separate us from this love of God in Christ Jesus. That's good news for days in the middle of global pandemic.

When you too feel like I've got nothing or next to nothing — I've got next to nothing left for my people, next to nothing left for this ministry, next to nothing left for my family and friends, next to nothing left for this moment... Well, good news: next to nothing is Jesus' favorite thing to work with! Bring it to me. Bring them to me. Like the disciples, we will never have or be enough by ourselves. But Jesus is enough. Sustained by Jesus and his promises, we've returned to the fray with hope. Where worldly wisdom suggests there is no cause for hope, we have hope. And we have so much to share. Jesus invites us to share the food with which we have been fed: bread and wine, mercy and sacrifice, community, hope, faith, and love. And hope and faith and love bubble up in fits of joy as God uses us little Christs to feed our neighbors, to speak the truth we know, and to act and work for the kingdom of God, where we know that all are welcome and all are fed. If you feel like you've got next to nothing left some days, it's enough. Because Jesus can turn next to nothing into more than enough. Bring it to me.

And so may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

*** Keywords ***

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