Pentecost 9 – Proper 13 – Year A – 2020

Food insecurity. We hear a great deal about food insecurity these days. It’s another way of saying that some folks don’t have enough to eat. They might not have enough to eat today, and they don’t have any way of knowing if they’ll have something to eat tomorrow. I don’t have the statistics on the number or percentage of people who are currently experiencing “food insecurity” in the US – let alone in the rest of the world – but it must be getting bigger, or we wouldn’t have come up with a new, more digestible way of saying that way too many people are hungry.

So it is hard, in the face of that, to hear the words of the prophet Isaiah this morning, with God inviting us to partake of a feast of rich food and milk and wine.

But then comes the question that follows the invitation:

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.

Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.

In other words, God is inviting us to pay attention to *God’s* way of doing things, look at *God’s intention*, and we will find a way to *live* through all of this*.*

In today’s gospel, we see Jesus demonstrating *God’s* way. It looks, in some ways, as another example showing God’s sense of abundance. But we need to look at the details.

Over the past few weeks, we’ve heard several parables talking about abundance. Remember the sower, who lavishly – and perhaps foolishly – throws the seed about so generously that it falls in all kinds of places. Last week we heard of the woman hiding a small amount of yeast in an *abundance* of flour – enough to yield an even *greater* abundance of bread.

And this week, Matthew moves us from parable to action – to tell us of Jesus multiplying a few loaves and fish into abundance enough to feed at least 10 or 12 thousand people (which would be the 5000 men mentioned along with the women and children who accompanied them) – and there were 12 baskets of leftovers. That is abundance indeed.

But the display by Jesus of what *God’s* way looks like comes well before that miraculous multiplication. We’re told that when Jesus came ashore and saw the great crowd, he had *compassion for them and cured their sick.* The word translated as compassion here is really quite strong. It’s talking about being moved in one’s gut, one’s bowels. Jesus is *moved* by the crowd, and he is moved to action. He *heals* them.

God’s way is *compassion -* feeling WITH someone – feeling it so deeply that one is *moved to act*. - We are good at feeling *bad* for people, or *sad* for people… but what God’s way looks like is feeling *with* others deeply enough that I am moved to act.

It is only after this that the disciples come to Jesus with concern about the crowds – or maybe it was concern about themselves. They were all probably tired and wanting to go home. When I read this part of the story, I am often reminded of something my dad said when one particular couple had stayed chatting well after the other card players had gone home from a card party at our house when I was a kid. He said, “Mother, if we’d go to bed, these people could go home.” Yes - Jesus, if you send these people away, we can go home.

The thing to note here is that before the disciples and all the people gathered had that experience of *abundance*, the prevailing mood among the disciples is one of *scarcity.* There is not enough… there is not enough *time* for people to get home to eat, given that night is approaching. If Jesus doesn’t hurry up and send the crowds away, there won’t even be enough time for them to go buy something to eat locally. – And when Jesus – perhaps not so politely – says that the people don’t *need* to go away – that the disciples them*selves* should feed the crowd, the response is, “We have nothing…” We don’t have *enough*. We have nothing but five loaves and two fish. That’s not even enough for Jesus and the disciples.

And Jesus says to them, “Bring them here to me.” Give me what you have. No matter what you think of it, no matter that you think it is not enough, bring it to me. Give me what you have.

God does not look at what we don’t have, but what we do have. God does not look at us and see what is lacking, but what is present. And the miracle is what God can do with what we have – what God can do with what we have.

It is hard, these days, not to look around and feel as if we can never be enough. The needs around us are too great. There are *too* many with food insecurity, too many with housing insecurity. There are too many divisions among us, there is too much hatred. I find myself understanding Paul’s lament that we heard in the letter to the Romans. I, too, have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart when I read or see what people can do to one another…

And I have to say that I think the only time we might think of “Abundance” is when we’re figuring out what we are willing to give others. We are willing to give from our abundance – from what we have extra, from our leftovers.

But that’s not what Jesus asks. He says, “What do you have?” tells us to bring it to him, and then he gives it *back* to us to give to the very ones we have asked *him* to help. Jesus indeed feeds the crowd, the multitude – but not by himself. God hears us voice our concerns – send the people away so they can get something to eat – and tells us there are other plans. They don’t need to go away to be fed and cared for. God invites us to stop looking through the lens of scarcity – at what we do not have, or what we cannot do – or perhaps even what we are not willing to do – the lens of scarcity that makes us want to hold on to what we have - and instead God asks us to live in God’s abundance – to bring what we do have – knowing it will be enough – in fact, there will be enough with some left over.

May it be so.

[Isaiah 55:1-5](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp13_RCL.html#ot2)[Psalm 145: 8-9, 15-22](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp13_RCL.html#ps2)[Romans 9:1-5](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp13_RCL.html#nt1)[Matthew 14:13-21](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp13_RCL.html#gsp1)