

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN TOO MUCH ISN'T ENOUGH?

God of true abundance, in whom nothing is lost and all are fed: liberate us from meager rations of scarce and grudging love for which we must compete; show us another kingdom which stills our all-consuming fear and fills us with new hope; through Jesus Christ, the peace of creation.

from Prayers for an Inclusive Church, Steven Shakespeare

JULY 25, 2021

THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

2 Kings 4:42-44, Psalm 145:10-19, John 6:1-21

ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

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MAY I SPEAK AND MAY WE HEAR FROM THE HEART OF THE LIVING GOD
WHO IS CREATING, REDEEMING, AND SANCTIFYING US.

Do you remember the beginning of the pandemic – when all the toilet paper and hand sanitizer disappeared from stores large and small – even Costco ran out of toilet paper, and paper towels and bottled water? So many shelves were stripped clean across the country – and anyplace that has a consumer economy across the globe?

Like a lot else about that COVID phenomenon – that is either ending or changing into something that we simply have to live with – despite the gift of vaccines – we had seen aspects of it before. On the eastern seaboard – even up into New Jersey and New

York – grocery stores would have to stock pallets of bottled water in the aisles to meet the demand of panic buying. Interesting that there is something called "panic buying...."

Of course the pandemic underscored other things we "knew" in some parts of brains – like how inter-related we are – how all God's children are actually one – no matter how we set up false categories of race or economics or national origin or identity or religion or culture.... And we saw in ways that surely we can't forget, that everyone needs certain things: nutritious food, safe housing, meaningful work, decent wages,

good healthcare, functional schooling, and community....

And, we saw how when people have those things, they can be incredibly adaptive, creative, self-giving, brilliant (sometimes even when they don't have them) – as we saw in so many ways through the miraculous development of vaccines, care for COVID patients, even in ways to continue schooling and meetings and the arts – even if not in the best ways – through technology like Zoom or other livestreams....

And we can know that all of everything – all that everyone needs and has all the time – comes from the vitality of creation, from the fullness of reality who is God's own self. As we prayed in the psalm a few moments ago: "¹⁵ the eyes of all look to you in hope, and **you give them** their food in due season. ¹⁶ **You open your hand** and satisfy the desire of every living thing." (Psalm 145)

Thus, panic buying...? (Which is to say we don't get it, a lot of the time. Especially when we think we need more and are content when some have none... as if God didn't provide enough for all when shared.)

But then we come to today's gospel reading and the multitude in the wilderness.

What do we do when too much isn't enough?

Jesus is in a crowd of maybe

8,000 to 12,000 people who have thronged to see him because of reports of "signs" he has performed - healings of sick people.

And who isn't up for the spectacle of someone being made well miraculously and unexplainably – which may be more the perception of the hype than what Jesus thought he was doing... remember he often said "your faith has made you well" - and didn't really play up the "magic" of what he was doing. (And, by the way, we often think medicine and healthcare are *not* miraculous; I'd question that...)

But here's the crowd, nonetheless.

And, legitimately, who isn't in need of some healing? So they may all be there for that... not a bunch of looky-loos.

Now if I look over the sermons I've preached or heard on this passage of John's gospel, I'm pretty sure most of them focus on the food: the hunger for it, the boy with the loaves and fish, the multiplication of those loaves and fish, everyone getting their fill, the *leftovers*... and there's a lot to say about all of them.

And food - well - it's important, right?

Why bother with a Community Kitchen if food isn't important...?

And, honestly I want to be healed wherever and whenever I'm

broken, I want to be fed. And I want others to be healed and to be fed. And, by the way, these were the people Jesus spent every day seeking out... people who were suffering in the world with him.

And it raises real questions for us – what healing are you needing? What healing does our community, our world need? What hunger do we have gnawing at the pit of our stomach?

But as much as this gospel reading does have the "feeding" at the center – and God's answer to panic buying – another instance of bell hooks' thought that "love is as love does" – I'm wondering about later on in the story. There are several key details hanging out there that need attention. And I'm wondering what they mean to you?

Do you notice that the "multitude" want to make Jesus their ruler?

Why? Because he was great with public policy? Because he had a lot of experience in administration? Because he was diplomatic? Because of his commitment to institutions and governments? (Jesus was none of these, really.)

Or was it because he gave them what they wanted when they wanted it?

It seems to me he was popular for a moment.

And it was a popularity that wasn't actually very widespread

and certainly didn't last....

Jesus didn't adopt a pattern of multiplying loaves and fish every day... and we know people are hungry every day... what was he revealing? Did people see what he was showing? Do *we* see what he was showing?

You can read here that he "escaped" the crowd when they came to put a crown on his head.

What would you have done?

Take the crown? Insist you were going to use it well – be a benevolent despot? How did Jesus live with power? (Or what was power for Jesus?)

Then there's the great scene with Jesus's friends - who, when the going got rough, got going. But they left Jesus behind... And then it got rougher. Dark, windy, waves breaking over the bow. They are **afraid** and then it got worse because Jesus came to them on the water. They try to drag him into the boat - as in: let's normalize this situation - (how many strange situations have been normalized over the past few years?) - and Jesus doesn't want it. As they are trying to make their sense of this bizarre day and situation... they arrive at their destination - almost as if Jesus is saying to them - no, this is not going to be *your* "normal" - and, in case you were wondering - I don't really need you to row me around the lake.... You are in my story, not the other way

around....

So a couple of things here:

How quickly are we ready to leave Jesus – or whatever experience of God that is sustaining our lives – behind?

When Jesus's friends got in the boat and all hell was breaking loose - how important was the food they had just had? How much were they basking in the feeding of the multitude? My guess is not very much - that their problems had moved on... so how fleeting is that kind of material gratification? And especially how key is the material gratification of *too much*? Did too much "fix" anything?

And what about that arrival? It sort of says to me that God is already wherever we are going... and also says that we *travel* by grace as much as we *arrive* anywhere by grace... the effort, rowing along, is not the main thing - though we may get all caught up in that part of the experience....

Where were they at the end? What was happening next? That's where this gospel reading goes – into the unknown, the uncertain, the not normal – and, that's what is on the **other side** – when too much **isn't** enough....

Most of all, it is not what will we eat, when will we get there, what are we doing, and all the why and how questions we concoct as we go

along – but the "who" question is both a question and not a question... we journey in the life of God within God's own self, one whom we cannot comprehend fully or even significantly – we have not the LEAST perception of nearly all of God even while God envelops us entirely. We are within the story of God, continually unfolding – and God makes no secret of it – even though much of it, due to our limitations, is mystery for us.

So wherever and however we go, the full extent of God and the pervasive, eternal love of God (DOING what love is) is both before and after what we want, where we came from, what we get and have (over and over again) and where we're going....

Are we ready for the journey ("ready" doesn't really matter)?

Just like the disciples in the boat, we're arriving now.

Now.

How awake, alive, attentive are we to the large questions, the mystery, the unknown, the uncertain that is unfolding NOW in this very large story of which we and every person and the whole of the creation are a part?

And can we hold, live, act in the tension – not just for ourselves but for our world, our communities, all the other people?

We're arriving. Now....