

Worship Service “*Good Food*”

Pentecost 10, Sunday, Year A

6th August 2023

Isaiah 55:1-5 NRSVUE / Matthew 14:13-21 NRSVUE

[Prelude \(Video\)](#)

[1-Prelude](#)

[2-Chant by Mark Dorian](#)

Opening Music (Video) [Let Us Be Bread](#) performed by Minister of Music Mark Johanson at Ascension Lutheran Church, written by Thomas J. Porter, 1990 GIA Publications, Inc., posted YouTube by jack terrell-wilkes

Welcome/Announcements

Pass the Peace (Video) [Passing the Peace](#) - *Chant* by Mark Dorian

Opening Hymn (Video) [What is This Place](#) **1** by Huub Oosterhuis (trad. Dutch hymn), Traditional Dutch hymn, 1626. Text and music copyright 1967. Exclusive agent for English language countries: OCP , posted to YouTube by Chris Brunelle, written by Bernard Huijbers, David Smith, Huub Oosterhuis, CCLI SONG # 1456535, Ekklesia Music Publishing (Admin. by Music Services, Inc.), used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20261246

Call to Worship (responsive)

One: Only the hungry search for bread. Only the thirsty look for water.

All: **This is a place for those who are hungry and thirsty in spirit.**

One: Only those who ache for meaning will pursue it. Only those who yearn for a deeper life will seek it.

All: **This is a place for those who ache and yearn for something more.**

One: So let us come here today with our hunger and thirst, our unsatisfied longings, our heart-felt yearnings, and let the God of life satisfy our souls

Invocation

Join me in a word of prayer. We gather today, O Creator of Life, seeking fullness. Not the fullness our world offers, but fullness that comes from You. We spend so much of our lives on things that do not count. Things that promise much and give little. Help us now... today, to find fulfillment in Your love, May we discover all you have to give, And seek You while we yet have the gift of days. Lift us O God, to a higher plane of living, as we lift our hearts and minds and souls into Your Holy presence. Make it so God! Amen!

Our First Testament reading this morning from the prophet Isaiah reflects on the ancient Israelites' hope in the covenant with their God in the face of exile and hardship. As we listen to these words, let's reflect on where we find hope in our journeys of faith, and how we might offer that hope to others.

First Testament Reading Isaiah 55:1-5 NRSVUE

Hear, everyone who thirsts; come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your earnings 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. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.

Now you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

Loving God, You are our Creator and Sustainer. When You open Your hand, You satisfy the hunger and thirst of every living thing. And so we look to You whenever we are in need, trusting in Your love and Your abundant goodness.

As You once fed the hungry crowds with five loaves and two small fish, we ask that You would again fill those who are empty this day. Pour out Your Spirit on all who hunger and thirst.

We pray for those who are physically hungry—whose stomachs are empty. We think especially of the people in Somalia and Eastern Africa who are facing critical food shortages; who are suffering the effects of malnutrition and starvation; and watching helplessly as loved ones die.

We pray for those who are empty emotionally—who are lonely and long for companionship and love, who are caught in the grip of depression, or overwhelmed with grief.

We pray for those who are spiritually empty—who are troubled, but don't know where to turn; who long for purpose and meaning, but don't know where to look; who need You, but do not yet know You.

God, we praise You for Your abundant gifts in our lives. Pour out Your Spirit on us as well. Fill us with Your compassion and love, so that we would willingly share some of our abundance with those who have need.

Beloved Sustainer, in Your mercy, open Your hand. Pour out Your Spirit, so that we may be filled.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, who came so that all of humanity might come to know the abundant life that comes from You. Amen.

Hymn (Lyric Video)

[Healer of Our Every Ill](#) 377

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Our gospel lesson this morning is a well-known story, the feeding of the five thousand. As we listen to this story, let's think about what nourishment we value, and how we share that nourishment with others.

Gospel Lesson

Matthew 14:13-21 NRSVUE

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.

When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.

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."

Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."

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

And he said, "Bring them here to me."

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.

And all ate and were filled, and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full.

And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Message – “ *Good Food* ”

Have you ever noticed that wherever food is present, Jesus is there? As often as he was praying, he was sharing food. Late in his ministry, he even identified himself with bread and wine – staples in the Mediterranean diet, then as now.

Food nourishes, brings pleasure and comfort; it fills us up – sometimes it makes us too full. Without food, we can become cranky and confused. We have a word for it today, “hangry.” Hungry plus angry. We might lose our way, become disoriented, lose our mental balance. I’m one that’s affected by getting “hangry.” Add tired to the mix and I become quite the grouch. All this goes to show that food is a basic necessity. It’s essential to our bodies and minds functioning properly. When the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, they were given manna for food: nothing fancy, just filling. The people became so bored eating manna day after day that they complained to God; and yet, they were fed.

Like many other stories in Matthew, there is a certain allusion to Jesus’ feeding of the multitude and God providing the manna to Moses and the Israelites in Exodus. Matthew tends to compare Jesus to Moses at every opportunity. And that was an important connection to make for his primarily Jewish audience. They were always looking for a connection to the prophets of old, particularly Moses. That’s probably the main reason we have the setting for our gospel story today.

Our reading starts with “when Jesus heard what happened...” The event referred to is the beheading of his prophet cousin, John the Baptist. People saw him as an important prophet, another Elijah. In fact, Herod himself thought Jesus was John reincarnated. So as he had before when things got stressful, he removed himself to a solitary place for meditation and reflection. But he did not go alone this time. His disciples were with him, and they were soon followed by a great multitude from the surrounding towns and villages. These were people who loved and believed in John, and saw Jesus as his replacement and successor. They were on the shore, and he had the boat brought in, and ministered to them, healing the sick and spending time among them. Yet as the day wore on, people began to be hungry. Many may even have become “hangry.” His disciples, always the logical, sensible ones, want to disperse the crowd to go into the local towns to get their own food. That would be the sensible thing, right? The disciples want to make sure the crowd gets some nourishment. Yet God’s way often is not what we would choose to do, what would make sense to us.

A big, hangry crowd isn’t a good thing. Circumstances could get out of control with 5000 people like that going without dinner. Of course, I’d feel bad for the employees at the nearby inns if they did disperse. When I was a teenager, I thought a bus pulling up into the McDonald’s I worked at was bad. Can you imagine thousands of people lining up in the local villages?

Yet in the hospitality tradition of Abraham, he has his disciples bring the little bit of food they do have. And like the master of a Jewish household, he says a blessing over the bread and breaks it, and gives it and the fish to the disciples to distribute. And lo and behold, everyone was fed, with 12 baskets of leftovers. And they were satisfied with what they ate. Like the Israelites in the desert, the manna Jesus provided them filled their needs.

But is this story really about the miracle itself? Is it about Jesus feeding 5000 people with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish? Or is it more about the compassion he shows to those he met that day? After all, he initially wanted some quiet time, away from the crowds. He had just heard about the death of his cousin. It was not a good day for him personally. Yet he saw their needs and he met them. He modeled the compassion of God. How often do we find ourselves in that situation?

It's not the best of days and then you get that call. Somebody you know is in crisis, or has a problem they need help with. You just don't feel up to it, but you respond anyway, and make the difference that person needs at that time. Often, you find your problems that day were pretty trivial compared to what others were going through. That's the kind of compassion our God and our Savior provides to us. Like the fish and the loaves, we get the food we need when we need it.

Certainly God provides for our physical sustenance, but more importantly, we get the spiritual support we often desperately need. All we need to do is approach and welcome God as the crowds followed and welcomed Jesus on that day. But more than that, we are called as his disciples to distribute that food, real and spiritual as well. Too often it can be all too easy to fall into the routine of being "admirers" and not real "followers" or disciples of the risen Christ.

Recently I heard that in Scotland, a voluntary survey was given to law enforcement officers of their religious affiliations. That may not sound very interesting, but what caught my attention was that 8 of the officers claimed their religious affiliation to be "Jedi". I laughed at the thought, not only because I was sure it was a prank, but also because we used to refer to ourselves as Jedi at seminary, and we called our Sci-Fi loving dean, Jedi Master Steve. I am a huge fan of Star Wars. I have watched the movies so many times that I can quote the dialogue line by line before the actors do. Matthew reminds us today that if we want to grow in my intimacy with our Savior, there is a great difference between an admiring fan and a devoted follower.

Jesus searches for and calls His followers to be devoted followers, not admiring fans. While I am an admiring fan of Star Wars, I am surely not a devoted follower. While Star Wars entertains me, I do not change the way I live or the way I think based on the movie. While I do enjoy the sights, sounds, plot and action that the movies provide, there is nothing significant that changes in my life because of those movies, especially since I am not strong enough in the force to pull the remote control over to me late in the evening..

It may be unfortunate, but there are many people in the church who are admiring fans of Jesus. There are many who applaud the carpenter from Nazareth and the cross from two thousand years ago. There are many who enjoy hearing about the miracles Jesus performed, the inspiring stories from the scriptures, and hearing the jokes and stories that the pastor will share during weekend services, however, nothing changes in their day to day lives. There are too many people who speak well of Jesus and the church, but neither He nor His church affects what they do outside the church walls. Jesus entertains them and they enjoy the sights and sounds that the church provides, but there are no significant changes to the way they live or how they think. They are just admiring fans of Jesus. In my walk with Jesus, Matthew reminds me that I must be sure that I am not just an admiring fan but a devoted follower.

Jesus says in Matthew to "make disciples of all nations." He doesn't want a large crowd of fans speaking well of Him. He doesn't want fans of the cross and people whose faith simply entails the wearing of a cross around their neck or a bumper sticker on their car. We're called to be so much more than that. Unlike being a fan, Christ calls us to make real change in our lives, and in the lives of others. Our faith is to have an impact on who we are, and how we act and live our lives daily. Jesus wants followers, or disciples, whose hearts are thrown across the line, who make it their passion everyday to please Him, and who are willing to follow Him with a reckless abandon for His cause. I must move from being one who admires what He has done, can do, and is doing, to one who is devoted to following Jesus regardless of the cost and consequences.

Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, "Salvation is free, ... but discipleship will cost you your life." Are you sharing your spiritual food with others? Are you feeding the hungry, physically and spiritually around you? We, as disciples, not admirers, are called to reach out to others in need, to answer that call to be there for someone in trouble, to show compassion as our Savior did that day in Galilee. He provides the manna we need, and in turn, we are to share and multiply that blessing with our own multitudes. One doesn't have to be a deacon or minister to provide the support others need.

That is the nature of God's grace. It is freely given to us, and we are to freely offer our grace to others. Like the fish and the loaves, not only is God's grace sufficient for us, there is an abundance left over for others, enough for everyone. It's not enough just to be a God fan, a Jesus admirer. We follow a God of action, and we're called to be out there on our own journey, touching the lives of others with compassion and giving freely of ourselves, not focusing only on ourselves. Once we are fed, we are to spread those extra baskets of spiritual food with others.

Jesus bore witness to our spiritual duty to care for each other. There is enough for everyone when we live in the right relation and harmony, but in reality there are millions of people who live in poverty and are starving, physically and spiritually.

What can we do when faced with such need? Well, we can do what Jesus did. We provide the best we can with what we have and join in the work God is doing around us. We have to work with God and with other people. When we work together and use what we have to do God's work, God will multiply what we offer. We are not to be a band-aid that provides a small amount of healing and protection for the hurting people around us, only to be taken off and once again made separate.

The church must be fused with those who seek nourishment, working as a unit to bring about healing. Part of our strategy should be to become a vital part of life around us, not just a place for people to visit on the weekends but truly to be a healing place for a hurting world.

For example, ministers take the bread of communion to those in "deserted places"- the sick, dying, imprisoned and elderly. They often feel on the fringe of life, less than appreciated, less than valued. When they receive Communion, the ministers are essentially telling them that they are part of a community, part of the people who are fed by God. Those who serve the Lord get to enjoy the fruit of the abundant supply that Jesus gives. Jesus is the example we are to follow. This story is a witness to the power of God. It is a story of grace that is sparked and motivated by the love and compassion of Jesus.

Jesus' actions with the crowd are actions that even the playing field, actions that make sure everyone is taken care of. They were radical actions at that time, and they are radical actions today. They seem foreign to a culture that is driven by dollars and profit and self-help, and they were so foreign in Jesus' time that he was put to death over them.

But following Jesus is a lifestyle of radical compassion, not just a fan club of ardent admirers. Can we live the same life of compassion for others? How do we share our own manna with others, physically and spiritually? Our world right now is one of great hurt with many living in desperation. The opportunities are many; the workers too few. May we find ways to reach out and show the compassion of Christ, and feed the multitudes of our day. Amen.

Call to Serve

As we listen to the following interlude, let's give some thought to what we might do in our own lives to meet the needs of others, modeling the compassion and caring Christ we follow.

A Time for Reflection (Video) [Aria](#)

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

On my own what I have to give doesn't amount to much in the light of all you have given to me and in the face of so much need. Put together as a community, what we offer you here in love becomes more, not simply added together, but somehow multiplied in its usefulness. We ask you to bless our gifts and with the addition of your blessing, just as it was with the loaves and fishes, there is enough for all. Amen

Hymn (Video)

[I Sing the Mighty Power of God](#) 46

performed by the Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, CA,
posted to YouTube by Martijn de Groot

Benediction

With the good news of God still moistening our mouths,
let us go seek our salvation with the least of these.
May we be a well of hope to our thirsting neighbors;
an oasis of opportunity to all we encounter.
Amen.

[Postlude \(Video\)](#)