

Proper 13, Year A
The Rev. Amy Donohue-Adams
Matthew 14:14-21
July 31,2011

Blessed be the Name of God!

Bill and I have a real passion for art! We have recently found a bronze sculpture that has deeply captured our imaginations. It is of a simply beautiful, plainly dressed black woman, with her beckoning eyes cast to the heavens. With her open hands clasped behind her back, she gently leans upward in a soulful/hopeful prayer. The name of the piece is “Looking for a Miracle”. Looking for a miracle! It is a stunning piece—she blesses us. We remember her, talk about her, and visit her often. This woman in bronze speaks to us, inspires us-- she moves us deeply. Looking for a miracle . . .

On that day long ago when Jesus heard that his friend/cousin/mentor John the Baptist had been cruelly beheaded, I can only believe Jesus was deeply devastated. I can only imagine he wanted to be left alone. I am sure Jesus wondered what John’s death meant for him. No doubt he wanted time to talk with his father. Quiet time. Prayerful time. I can imagine Jesus simply wanted to get away in his boat and be alone with his broken heart, to have time to lift his eyes to heaven, with his back gently leaning upward in soulful/hopeful prayer—deeply moved and compassionately looking for a miracle!

Today’s gospel is all too familiar. Five loaves and two fish. How do we talk about this in a new way? Five loaves and two fish. We could talk about miracles in general because this story is the only miracle reported in all four gospels—that might make miracles a compelling approach. Or we could talk about why such a huge crowd would want to traipse around the countryside following after Jesus. Or, we could talk about our role in God’s work – Jesus gave the food to the disciples who then distributed it to the crowd (“Go, thou and do likewise.”) Or we could simply focus on the generosity of that one little boy with the five loaves and two fish as reported in John’s gospel. There are any numbers of sermons here.

Today we will focus on the abundance of Jesus' compassion and precisely how little the menu was. Five loaves and two fish. Not enough. Not for hungry people. How little it takes with the abundance of God's love, and our generous response.

Listen again to the disciples: "Lord, it is late; send the crowds away to get some supper." You will note here that this time the disciples actually came up with a plan. They did not ask what to do, but rather came with the easiest solution, "send the crowds away . . ."

Jesus compassionately says, "Naw, that will not do. They can stay; YOU will feed them." The disciples are astounded and say, "What! Lord, we have nothing here but five loaves and two fish. And that is not enough for anything much less these numbers!" One by one they chimed in, "Lord, we have only five loaves and two fish. Lord you can see we have nothing here but five loaves and two fish. What are we to do?"

Let's look at it from the disciple point of view. "Five thousand plus women and children, numbers closer to 13,000 had followed Jesus into the wilderness. They had come to listen to Jesus' words, to feel his healing touch, to be near something . . . someone . . . special. They were moved to something beyond themselves, someone who fed their deepest cravings and longings. They lost the physical sense of everything including time. And now the story says the hour had grown late, it was time for supper, and they were hungry. And there was no way to buy food for so large a crowd. No Payless, no Red Apple, no farmer's market nearby. What were they to do?"

Fortunately for the Twelve and the 13,000 in the story and fortunately for us, the story does not end with Jesus asking the seemingly impossible of the disciples. Jesus did not wander off into the desert leaving them and us stranded. Surprisingly Jesus said, "YOU give them something to eat". Plain and simple. I have even heard it said more plainly, "Give them something to eat, YOURSELVES!"

Can you hear the words of our Eucharistic prayer Rite 1? "And we earnestly desire thy fatherly goodness to accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, whereby we offer unto thee, O Lord, OURSELVES, our souls and bodies?" Or perhaps

our corporate response to Eucharistic Prayer 2 in Rite II comes more to mind. “We offer to you our gifts of bread and wine, and OURSELVES, a living sacrifice.” Either way, “Give them something to eat, YOURSELVES, is the message of Jesus!! Loud and clear!

And yet we, and the disciples, ask again and again, “How? We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” Then Jesus, taking the prayerful posture, not unlike our soulful lady sculpted in bronze, looks up to heaven, and blesses and breaks the loaves and fish, and gives them to the disciples to give to the crowds. All ate and were filled with much left over.”

This is good news to St. Augustine’s. and certainly not “new news” Years ago you all wondered, do we have what it takes to build an Episcopal church on the south end of Whidbey Island? At best and in the face of overwhelming odds, many feared and many believed “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” But thankfully we have a friend, Jesus, and thankfully we listened as he whispered, “Bring YOURSELVES to me. Bring all of YOU –your love of God and neighbor, your financial commitments and your resources, your skills and weaknesses, your strengths and fears, yourselves, your children and your futures. Bring them all to me, and I will make YOU equal to the task at hand. And so it was. St. Augustine’s in the Woods was born and continues on today.

I truly imagine the many other ministries here at St. Augustine’s were born of the same Gospel spirit with a similar selflessness! Do we have what it takes to see that those on the island do not go hungry or naked? Do we have what it takes so we can all be of Good Cheer? And the Good Cheer ministry was born and continues on today. Do we have what it takes to help those neighbors who are failing in memory to find love and security within our community by spending quality Time Together? And the Time Together ministry was born and continues on today. Do we have what it takes to reach out with a Helping Hand to provide financial help and share resources with one another? And the Helping Hands ministry was born and continues on today. And new inspirations continue to surface in the same sweet spirit.

And every single time, in the face of overwhelming odds, many feared and many believed that “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” But thankfully we have a friend, Jesus, and thankfully we listened as he whispered, “Bring YOURSELVES and all of them to me. Bring everything to me, your love of God and neighbor, your financial commitments and your resources, your skills and weaknesses, your strengths and fears, bring yourselves, your children, your futures and those in need. Bring them all to me, and I will make YOU equal to the task at hand. And so it was and is today. These ministries were born. Good Cheer, Time Together, and Helping Hands and others that many of you can name now, silently or aloud!

Three weeks ago the good news according to our warden, Harry Anderson, was that, at best, while many feared and many believed, and in the face of overwhelming odds, when we thought the building program was beyond our wildest dreams, even quarreled about its probabilities and its possibilities-- each saying in our own particular voice, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish!” Today we realize that generous, wise, and creative financing and our continued open hearted generosity have joined together! And two things happened at once. We are now closer in sight of our debt free parish hall than anyone ever thought possible!! And we need to augment our working budget to meet our new everyday expenses and upkeep!

Today St. Augustine’s and now our new parish hall stands as a sign of God’s loving presence and abundant kindness on Whidbey Island. It is ready and waiting to be put into service! St. Augustine’s is built upon firm foundations. The secure undaunted faith of our forebears, many of whom continually pray and give generously of themselves and their resources, many of whom continuously stand side by side with us today. St. Augustine’s is built on lifelong models of generous giving, even as many worried how little the menu often was. Five loaves and two fish. Not enough. Not for hungry people.

As in the beginning and as is now, WE hear again the words of our dearest friend, Jesus. “YOU give them something to eat. Give them something to eat YOURSELVES!” Yet we, and the disciples, often don’t get it! “How?” Thankfully we

have a very patient and long suffering friend, Jesus, who quietly whispers again and again in our ear, “Bring YOURSELVES, your bodies and souls, YOUR hearts for ministry, your gifts and talents for outreach, YOUR money, your riches and your treasures to share with all. Bring everything to me, bring your love of God and neighbor, your love of the poor and the disenfranchised, bring your financial commitments and your resources, your skills and weaknesses, your strengths and fears, bring YOURSELVES, your children and your futures. Bring them all to me and we will join them all together, and I will make YOU equal to the task at hand.”

Then Jesus, taking a prayerful posture, not unlike the bronze sculpture of the inspiring, soulful/hopeful lady, lifted his eyes to heaven. He was deeply moved and looking for a miracle. He blessed and broke the gathered gift of loaves and fish and said in a whispered voice we all could hear, “Bring everything and join ME in God’s wildest dream of abundant compassion and unconditional love for all.”

And so it was, and so it is now, in Freeland, Washington!

Blessed be the Name of God!