

Second Sunday in Lent

March 5, 2023

1 Kings 17:8–16

Matthew 14:13–21

“On the Journey God Provides”

1. The story of the feeding of over 5,000 people helps us ponder the humanity of Jesus and of his followers
  - a. The story follows right after the story of John the Baptizer being executed by Herod
    - i. The passage has us understand that Jesus was grieving and looking for solitude
    - ii. So he got into a boat to go across the Sea of Galilee (it’s not clear to me where the disciples were at this time – the story says he was in the boat by himself, yet eventually the disciples are with him)
    - iii. However it happened, what we know is that as Jesus prepared to disembark, a crowd had guessed where he had been heading, and they were waiting for him
    - iv. He wanted, he needed solitude. Didn’t get it.
    - v. Instead he found himself surrounded by a crowd, a needy crowd.
    - vi. And here we read of another very human emotion: He had compassion for the people who had come looking for, people who were sick, and he healed them.
    - vii. Perhaps not great boundaries, Jesus, but nonetheless, he is consistent with his vision to care for the people
  - b. Enter the disciples:
    - i. The narrative had established that Jesus had been going to an out-of-the-way place looking for solitude
    - ii. So not only had this crowd come from a distance, but they also would have to travel a way to get back home, or to the nearest town
    - iii. As the day was getting late, the disciples told Jesus to wrap it up. Time to go.
    - iv. One could generously think that they were concerned for the crowd, or that they wanted Jesus to get the time off he had been hoping for.
    - v. Or maybe they were just cranky and wanted the crowd to go away so they could call it a day. Maybe. It would have been a very human reaction.
  - c. But Jesus takes their “concern” (the crowd needs food) and he turns it back to them: You give them something to eat
  - d. Why would you ask us to do something when I have so little!? Again, a very human reaction

2. The gospel story along with the story of the widow feeding Elijah focuses us on what we might mean when we say, in faith, “God Provides”
  - a. The widowed woman Elijah met, turns out, was almost to her last meal
    - i. She didn’t live in Palestine. She lived in a neighboring country
    - ii. The story happened during a time of drought.
    - iii. The woman showed Elijah hospitality (was going to get him a cup of water)
    - iv. And it is when Elijah asked for more, that she confided that she was at the end of her rope.
    - v. She acknowledged the God of Elijah, but says it like that isn’t her faith tradition
    - vi. When Elijah insists, and promises God would provide, she leans in and helps him
    - vii. Give it to me, says Elijah. God will stretch it.
  - b. In the Gospel story, the disciples were also concerned about not having enough
    - i. They plainly say: We have nothing! (well, OK, we have 5 loaves and 2 fish!)
    - ii. But Jesus says, that will do, and asks the crowd to sit and the disciples to wait tables, so to speak
    - iii. Give it to me, Jesus says.
    - iv. And in a miraculous way, Jesus stretches the simple provisions like God stretched the widowed woman’s oil and flour
    - v. And the crowd ate and were filled. And there were left overs!
3. Reading these stories, one does wonder what it would mean for you and me to put ourselves in the place of the disciples or of the widow – HOW will God provide?
  - a. There is such a leap when it comes to giving to God what we little we might have in order for God to stretch it.
  - b. So, I’d say be careful next time this thought comes into your mind: “Somebody ought to do something about that problem” because you might just hear the Spirit say: “How about you?”
    - i. Oh, you can’t mean me, Lord. I don’t have the time, or the money, or the skills.
    - ii. Well, give me what you do have, says God
    - iii. A year later, for example, this church has rallied to support one Afghan family being resettled in Columbus, raising over \$20,000 and donating hundreds if not thousands of volunteer hours to help them.
    - iv. And all this as together with St. Bartholomew’s we became catalysts to invite five additional worshipping communities so a total of SEVEN Afghan families were resettled, not to mention how we touched the lives of hundreds more with the donations we and others in the community.
    - v. God took what we had and multiplied it

- c. “Somebody ought to do something about that”
  - i. As a Matthew 25 church, FPC works towards Congregational Vitality, Dismantling Structural Racism and Eradicating Systemic Poverty.
  - ii. It is in that last area that we have been learning more about the need for affordable housing particularly in Columbus.
  - iii. Our church is in the early stages of our work to learn and act. We have had Sunday School classes about the topic.
  - iv. We have a lead team to clarify the issues. We’re meeting one-on-one with stakeholders in the community, asking questions.
  - v. And at this stage, we have yet to identify a specific project we would rally around, so we are right now articulating the group’s objective broadly: **Our objective is to make it easier for people with low or no income to live in Bartholomew County.**
    - 1. Um, you can’t mean us, Lord! There aren’t enough units in the market!
    - 2. Housing here is so expensive!
    - 3. All we have is an old church building in half a city block, and a small congregation with volunteers already maxed out in their commitment.
    - 4. Those people should probably try to go somewhere else to find a place to live...
  - vi. Yet I trust God will take what we offer and multiply it...
- 4. God provides. Sometimes God provides us with ability, ingenuity, resources, relationships. Sometimes God provides a neighbor or church member who supports us in our need. Sometimes God provides sufficient resources so we can give to others. No matter what God provides, when we offer to God what little we might have, God will multiply it, making us see our abundance even in the midst of our need.

#### Reflection questions

1. Share the story of a time when God provided for your needs in an unexpected way.
2. In Matthew 14:13–21, why wouldn’t Jesus just feed the crowd, instead of first asking the disciples to do it themselves?
3. Share a story of a time when you replied to a call from God with a version of “Oh, I don’t have enough \_\_\_\_\_ to be able to make a difference” and yet God provided...

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-18/commentary-on-matthew-1413-21-5>

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/when-a-miracle-is-more-than-a-miracle>