

**Matthew 14:13-21**  
**Blessed, Broken, Given**  
**(SPC 8/08)**

In today's reading from Matthew's gospel, we can see the action of the Holy Spirit in drawing Jesus' first disciples into the very heart and life of God ...much to their chagrin, I might add!

Jesus compels them to participate in the miraculous feeding of the crowds who followed him. And, even though he certainly could've done it without them, he clearly chose not to.

This story is yet another beautiful depiction of Jesus healing and feeding the multitudes who are drawn to him, seeking nourishment and wholeness ... seeking shalom.

But one of the more interesting aspects of this story is actually omitted by what we read this morning. In Matthew's gospel, immediately before this, Jesus is told of the brutal murder, in prison, of John the Baptist.

The story actually reads like this:

“His disciples (John's) came and took the body and buried it; then they went and told Jesus. 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 ...” and so on.

Jesus has just received word that John has been killed. From the little that we know about the relationship between the two of them, Jesus apparently thought very highly of John, and probably loved him deeply as a member of his own extended family.

Jesus is most likely very sad, and angry, and grieving. He's trying to go “to a deserted place by himself.” He's trying to get away ... to be alone with God. But the people, in their desperate need, would have none of that.

Now, not for anything, but if I were Jesus, and if I had just heard that someone I love had been brutally murdered by some oppressive sicko political puppet, and if I were trying to run away to be alone with God, probably to cry and scream and grieve ...

and if I were stepping off that boat only to find a very large group of people who wanted something from me ... I'm not quite sure what would've happened!

But we know what happened with Jesus. And that's because he understands that there's really no difference between meeting God in God's self and meeting God in others. And he knows that better than any of us.

Anyway, the story goes on. Jesus has compassion for the people. He chooses to suffer with them ... which is the real definition of the word “compassion,” it means “to suffer with.”

So he stays with them, and he heals them. The day goes by. It gets late. The disciples finally tell him to send the crowds away, so that they can find something to eat back in their towns and villages.

And then Jesus says an amazing thing. He’s always saying amazing things, isn’t he? He says ... “You give them something to eat.”

Can’t you just see the disciples looking at each other like, what in the world is he saying now? It’s time for a little reality check here, Jesus ... we’ve got these five measly little loaves of bread and two ... two ...scrawny little fish ... and there are thousands of people here, Jesus ... thousands ... and they’re hungry!

And then Jesus does exactly what he does every time he feeds others, in these gospel stories of Eucharistic action. He takes what they give him, he blesses it, and breaks it, and gives it to them, to give to others ... to all others, to everyone who is present and who is hungry.

“Taking the five loaves and 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.”

Jesus accepted their offering ... regardless of how small it was, how insignificant it was, how utterly inadequate it was, how broken it was ... he took it, and blessed it, and gave it to them, to give to others ... to all the others, to everybody there.

This story is filled with the brokenness of humanity and the compassionate love of God, who suffers with us.

Everyone is broken ... Jesus is broken in his grief, the disciples are broken in their inadequacy and lack of faith, the crowds are broken in their sickness, and hunger, and need.

Everyone is broken. And that’s ok ... because God’s power is never stronger than in our brokenness. God’s glory shines brightest when it shines through our brokenness.

Was there ever a time when Jesus Christ was more powerful ... than when he hung shattered and broken on the cross?

And that's the key, really. The cross is the key. The passionate love of God, the compassion of God-who-is-with-us, is most clearly seen in the passion of Jesus Christ ... in his staying with us in the depths of our alienation, and suffering, and death ... in the dregs of the brokenness of our humanity ... in order to transform it all by the presence of God.

The compassion of God changes everyone and everything it touches.

It's precisely in our brokenness that God's power is the strongest. Like our Christ, we're all wounded healers. All of us. And we're all called by God precisely in our brokenness.

The biggest mistake, the only mistake really, is to deny our humanity by denying our brokenness. In doing so, we deny the love and mercy of God!

As many of you know, the Lambeth Conference is finishing up today. It's a meeting that's held once every 10 years by the bishops of the world-wide Anglican Communion, of which the Episcopal Church USA is a member. And this was a tough one, given the issues facing us today, and the diversity of opinions about how to deal with them.

Most of our bishops (most of our bishops!) worked very hard to try to listen, and understand, and reach out to one another across national and cultural lines.

Unity in diversity is hard work ... but it's the work of the Holy Spirit. It's one of the founding principles of our church, because most of us believe that it reflects what we know about God, who has been revealed as a community, a trinity of persons, who are in themselves a unity in diversity.

It's our very image of God and, as such, it's foundational to what we believe and how we believe it.

Unity in diversity is hard work. And the reason it's so hard is because, as human beings, our brokenness often gets in the way. But if we deny our brokenness by ignoring it, by covering it up, by trying to legislate around it, or by alienating those with whom we disagree, it can only hurt us.

If we deny our brokenness by denying our brothers and sisters in Christ ... any of our brothers and sisters in Christ ... any human being for whom Christ died, it can only destroy us. Our church could ultimately self destruct.

But I think we can be very hopeful. Remember the words of Julian of Norwich, who said, "It exists and always will because God loves it." I believe that about our church. And I believe it even more about our mission.

**If we embrace our brokenness, and the brokenness of one another, even as Christ has, we can be healed. And we can be healers. We can be what we're called to be ... the Body of Christ, the sacrament of God ... given for the life of the world.**

**Everyone is invited. All the broken people, and the whole broken creation along with us. As the prophet Isaiah says ... Come, all you who are hungry and thirsty, everybody come.**

**Come to the house of God. Come to the table of Christ.**

**Come in your brokenness, your hopelessness, your pain, your doubt, your fear, your lack of love ... come. Come and have your brokenness blessed by God to be given to others.**

**People are hungry for faith ... in Christ, we have that faith.  
They're hungry for hope ... in Christ, we have that hope.  
They're hungry for love ... in Christ, we have that love.  
People are hungry for peace, and joy, and healing, and life, and wholeness, and justice, and shalom ... in Christ, we have all of that and more. We really do have it all.**

**As St. Paul says, "All things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's."**

**People are hungry ... and we have that bread. As the Body of Christ, we are that bread!**

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