March 13

Grace and peace to you this day.

Once again this week, I would like to set aside our walk through the Biblical books in order and focus on a passage of Scripture that has very much been on my heart this week. It is a passage that is familiar to most, if not all of us. I'm going to include the entire passage here and then refer to it during the coming week. This is how it is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew:

“When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, ‘This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.’ Jesus replied, ‘They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.’ ‘We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,’ they answered.; ‘Bring them here to me,’ he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children” (14:13-21).

For many years, Judy and her five siblings had a rotating schedule for hosting Thanksgiving dinner. In about the fourth or fifth year we were married, the task fell to us. We had about 35 or so people in our first little house. Tables and chairs from church, days of shopping and preparation, cleaning the house, coordinating side dishes and desserts, countless phone calls, and so on. In our Scripture passage for today, Jesus is faced with the immediate task of feeding not just 35 people after days of preparation, but “five thousand men, besides women and children.” In other words, about ten thousand people. For reference, a crowd of 10,000 people looks something like this:
IHS,  
Pastor Lou  

March 14  
Grace and peace to you this day.  

When faced with a certain situation, many of us often have a predictable way of thinking and reacting. I often refer to this as our “default setting.”  

For example, think of when you are driving along and you see someone out at intersection with a tattered cardboard sign that says something like “Homeless. Hungry. Please help.” What is your immediate reaction?  

For many of us, we may give them a dollar or some spare change, mumble a “God bless you,” and go on our way. For others of us, we may simply avoid the person altogether. As they walk past us we may avoid eye contact and hope that they simply move along. For others, we may wonder, perhaps out loud, “Why don’t they get a job? There are plenty of jobs out there.” Or maybe our thoughts turn to something like this: “I’m not giving them money. They’ll just buy it for drugs or booze anyway.” All of those are our default settings. That’s ok, because Jesus had a default setting, too. It is described in the following excerpt from this week’s passage:  

“‘When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick” (Matthew 14:13-14).  

Jesus’ initial reaction to human need, His “default setting,” is compassion. We see this time and again throughout His ministry. For example:  

“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and
sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had *compassion* on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:35-36).

Notice that Jesus does not necessarily concern Himself with the *cause* of human need. Rather, He concerns Himself with *fulfilling* human need. Jesus meets need, and humanity, head on. In doing so, He puts on full display both His own humanity, as well as His divinity.

Tomorrow: “Can you pick up a loaf of bread?”

IHS,
Pastor Lou

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March 15
Greetings, DGCC Family.

Every person present that day knew what it took to produce a loaf of bread. Ten thousand people knew what it was like to plant a crop of wheat and pray for the right mix of sun and rain. Every person there knew what the backbreaking work of harvest was like. Every person there knew what it was like to thresh the wheat, separating the kernels from the chaff. Every person there knew what it was like to grind the wheat (or barley) into flour, and to pick the olives and grind them into oil.

Every person there knew what it was like to grow yeast in the sun and harvest salt from the sea. Every person there knew what it was like to chop wood for the fire in the oven. Every person there knew what it was like to knead the flour and oil and water and salt and yeast into bread dough. Every person there knew every laborious step it took to create a simple loaf of bread. No stopping at the store on the way home from the office to pick up a loaf. Making bread was *work*. And lots of it. Catching fish and smoking it or salting it was *work*, and lots of it. Especially when you have to feed ten thousand people. And right now.

And yet, Jesus creates bread, and He creates fish, from nothing. Much like His Father at Creation, He speaks them into existence. This is how Matthew records it:

“Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over” (Matthew 14:20-21).

The Greek word used here by Matthew for “satisfy” is *chortazo*. It literally can mean “to fatten.” Jesus created such abundance from nothing that the people were completely filled up. And, there were leftovers!

Tomorrow: “*You* feed them.”

IHS,
March 16

Grace and peace to you this day.

“Jesus replied, ‘They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat’” (Matthew 14:18).

Do not turn them away. You feed them.

Every Thursday, a scene unfolds first at 66th and Fairview on Downers Grove, and then at 18th and Loomis on the near South Side of Chicago.

The scene at 66th and Fairview is the preparation of the loaves and fishes by dedicated servants of the Lord and His people. People who take seriously the Lord’s command: “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

It’s simple really. No need for a sermon or a bulletin or an order of service. Instead, “Feed them. Show them my love. Pray with them. Shower them with basic human dignity. Let them know that you care. And in doing so, let them know that I care. But do not send them away.”

And then the scene at 18th and Loomis looks like this:
It needs no explanation, really. Just God’s people serving God’s people.

As we wrap up for the week, I would like to compare the photo above with one that was in the Wall Street Journal this week. It was a picture of “celebrity” chef Wolfgang Puck and the meal he plans to serve to the other “celebrities” Sunday after the Oscar ceremonies. Here’s the picture:

I can’t help but thinking that those people Sunday night, they don’t know what they’re missing.

IHS,
Pastor Lou
March 17

Happy Friday and Happy St. Patrick’s Day, everyone!

Here’s your musical devotional for the week. Turn up the volume and enjoy.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihJAJA4ibEs

IHS,

Pastor Lou