

Message:

While Unity doesn't follow the lectionary readings, I have to say I was tempted by today's reading from Luke: Jesus dining at the home of a Pharisee shares a parable not only about inviting the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind to the table. He also admonishes the wealthy and privileged against the practice of issuing invitations as part of the economic system they've adopted from the Roman empire. So, as is often the case, Jesus is reminding us that we are called to care for the vulnerable AND to resist the lure of empire's power and privilege. Find Diana Butler Bass' [Sunday Musings in The Cottage](#), on substack or her website! It's pointed, and great food for reflection!

Instead, I kept coming back to my favorite miracle– the loaves and fishes- because “you feed them” has been echoing in my prayer life and daily life, for weeks now. It also feels perfect for a gathering “FOCUSed” on Together, We Can Do More:

Matthew 14:13-21

Feeding the Five Thousand

13 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. 14 When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. 15 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.”

16 Jesus said to them, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” 17 They replied, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” 18 And he said, “Bring them here to me.” 19 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. 20 And all ate and were filled, and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. 21 And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

“They need not go away; you give them something to eat.”

Each gospel writer shares this story of feeding the hungry crowd. There are slight variations, but they all share the same basic narrative arc:

- Crowds have followed Jesus and he has performed miracles of healing
- It’s growing late and the disciples want to send the crowds back into surrounding villages to find food since they have only a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish
- Jesus admonishes them, “You give them something to eat.”
- Then Jesus gives thanks to “heaven”; he prays and blesses the food
- There is enough left over to fill 12 (or 7!) baskets

This has long been one of my favorite Jesus miracle stories. Because what I picture happening is the spread of generosity: Jesus paused to give thanks, and it opened up the crowd to share what little they had. One fisherman and his wife pull out another loaf, and another fish or two. Someone passes along the figs they’d brought, or shares a bit of cheese. The mamas and grandmas gather little ones and make sure they have a bit of bread and soon “5000 men, besides women and children” have eaten their fill, with abundance to spare. The disciples fret, Jesus prays, people are fed. Together, we can do more.

I love that both Unity and FOCUS share a thread of putting faith into works:

“prayer and service in our community and the world...”

“respond to our neighbor's needs in the city of Albany and beyond...”

In the passage from Matthew that directly precedes the story of the miracle of loaves and fishes, before Jesus looked with compassion on the hungry crowd, he is told of the death of his cousin, John the Baptist. I imagine now a Jesus, with heart heavy with grief,

perhaps despairing at the challenges of teaching over and over again a message that often fell on ears and hearts unable to fully understand. But a Jesus who first gives thanks, then opens a crowd of thousands to the simple miracle of feeding each other.

We sometimes fret. We see the aching needs of our neighbors near and far. We pray. We feed people. We become the miracle awakening in the face of the world's heartbreak. We answer the call to love, then love more. Let's listen now to this song calling us to awaken ever more deeply to that call.

AWAKENING

When We Breathe Together by Jan Richardson

This is the blessing
we cannot speak
by ourselves.

This is the blessing
we cannot summon
by our own devices,
cannot shape
to our own purposes,
cannot bend
to our own will.

This is the blessing
that comes
when we leave behind
our aloneness,
when we gather
together,

when we turn
toward one another.

This is the blessing
that blazes among us
when we speak
the words
strange to our ears,

when we finally listen
into the chaos,

when we breathe together
at last.

There is So. Much. Chaos. Much of the chaos is unique to our particular moment in history— to the culture we live in that exalts individualism over the common good, consumerism over living simply so that others may simply live, violence and othering over love your neighbor as yourself.

Yet some of the chaos is the human experience echoed in ancient holy texts, myths and stories from across the world. Yet always too, into that chaos is the opening of possibility. There is holy heartbreak that awakens us to the needs of the earth, to the needs of our neighbors, to the gifts of joining together to do more. To serve more. To pray more. To sing more. To Love more.

And so it is. Amen.