Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“This is a deserted place, and it is already late” (Matt 14:15).

Jer 28:1-17; Matt 14:13-21

Today’s story of the multiplication of loaves and fishes begins with an ominous mention of the fact that Jesus has just received word of the beheading of John the Baptist by King Herod. He and the disciples have withdrawn in their boat to absorb this shocking news. But when they arrive on the far shore, crowds had already heard that Jesus was there, and they massed in the wilderness to hear him preach.

If there is a moment in his public ministry when Jesus might have felt overwhelmed and even discouraged, it could be this scene. Yet, when he sees the crowds, Jesus is moved to the depths with pity for them in their distress. Many have brought sick family and friends, and he reaches out to cure them. His heart of mercy is already moving to respond to their needs, even in what is shaping up to be an impossible situation.

The disciples grow anxious as the day wears on and it becomes late, knowing there is no plan to provide for so many. Scarcity creates fear and competition, desperation can lead to conflict. Things could get out of hand. The most practical thing is to have Jesus send them to the nearby villages to buy food. But he startles the disciples with the suggestion, “Give them some food yourselves.”

We know how the story ends. The food they need is already there, first in the five loaves and two fish, then in the miraculous sharing that unfolds in waves of

generosity and openness inspired by Jesus' confidence in Providence and in his disciples to solve the crisis.

When we feel overwhelmed by the needs we see all around us, or even in our own personal lives, Jesus tells us not to be afraid, but to let compassion be the source of inspiration as we do what we can with what we have. Our small gift of self will be multiplied if we believe. There is always enough where compassion wins out over fear and distrust.

The drama of whether Ukrainian wheat will reach its intended markets has only emphasized how interdependent our world is. A war in one place means famine and more death elsewhere. Food sufficiency is about distribution and not supply. There is always enough, but fear of scarcity or conflict interrupts the life flow of resources to everyone.

We pray today for the family banquet that is integral to the Beloved Community God wants for the world. Activists working for peace and justice strive toward this vision of heaven coming to earth.

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