

Genesis 32:22-31, Psalm 17:1-7,16, Romans 9:1-5, Matthew 14:13-21

Our third reading today has a unique honor. It is the one miracle story that is recounted in all 4 of the Gospels.

According to Rev. Dr. Clifton Kirkpatrick “this account of the feeding of the five thousand was treasured by the early church because it taught Christians the very heart of the gospel message and was a deep source of hope and inspiration for Christians who were seeking to be faithful against great odds.”¹

As is often the case in Matthew’s gospel Jesus went to a deserted place, attempting to get away from his multitude of followers. But the crowd was not to be deterred and they trailed along. As the day draws toward evening the disciples are faced with the dilemma of how to feed over 5,000 people with only a couple of fish and a few loaves of bread. The amount of food they believed they possessed would not possibly make a difference for all of those hungry people. The task seemed impossible. Why set themselves up for failure? Better to send the people away to fend for themselves.

Rev. Dr. Dock Hollingsworth points out in his commentary on this reading that while the disciples may have felt they did not have enough, Jesus empowers them to believe differently. He encourages that the message for us today is “Jesus is calling upon us to dream bigger.”²

Both Hollingsworth and Kirkpatrick point out that Jesus did not do the feeding himself, he told the disciples to do it. “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.”³ That commissioning is important for us, just as it was for the disciples. Jesus has entrusted us to be his hands and feet.

Given the state of our country many of us feel helpless and hopeless about a multitude of topics. We are living in one of the most polarized times in our history as a nation. We are inundated with reports of violence and unrest. Incidents of hate and discrimination are constant on our social media feeds.

Our instincts, just like the disciples of old, might be to expect people to fend for themselves.

But as Christians we are called to exemplify God’s love to all of our sisters and brothers.

In his book Dear Church, Lutheran pastor Lenny Duncan describes the modern day challenge that might be the equivalent of feeding the 5,000. Pastor Duncan implores that “We must dismantle, destroy, and bury white supremacy. In this nation. In our pews. In our liturgies. As a church, as a people, and as Christians, this is our call...”⁴

I imagine some of us believe that we are not racist and therefore we are doing our part already. But Pastor Duncan continues by stating, “Passivity is the new engine of systemic racism”⁵ and Dr. Ibrahim Kendi explains in his book “How to be an anti-racist” that there is no such thing as neutral when it comes to racism. You are either actively working to be an anti-racist or you are contributing to racism.

I know the natural reaction might be how can I single-handedly reverse hundreds of years of cultural and institutional racism? But the good news of today's Gospel reading assures us, we don't have to do it alone. God has empowered us. And if we listen deeply to the message of Jesus Christ, we have a moral imperative as his followers to take what we have - lift it to God - and share it with others.

The symbolism of the eucharist translates into action. We must listen to the stories of oppression people of color in this country live with every day, we must learn how the true history of this country - not the white washed version many of us were taught in school - has created inequality, and we must empower people of color by demanding equal justice for all. I do not pretend it will be easy, but it is long overdue and I agree with Pastor Duncan: "It is our duty and our joy that in this time and this place we join the angels and the archangels, the witnesses of the resurrection in their never-ending hymn of justice."⁶

I invite you to begin this journey to justice as a parish by participating in the Repentance Project's daily devotional An American Lament. Together we will learn about the legacies of slavery in our nation and how they affect us today. Next week we will share information on how you can participate and it is my greatest hope that you all will as you are able.

I would like to close today with the words of Valerie Kaur, a Sikh activist, filmmaker and civil rights lawyer. This is from an address she gave on New Year's Eve 2016. She spoke about laboring for justice even when we feel hopeless. Here are her words⁷:

"The future is dark. But what if - what if this darkness is not the darkness of the tomb but the darkness of the womb? What if our America is not dead but a country that is waiting to be born? What if the story of America is one long labor? What if all of our grandfathers and grandmothers are standing behind us now, those who survived occupation and genocide, slavery and Jim Crow, detentions and political assault? What if they are whispering in our ear, 'You are brave'? What if this is our nation's greatest transition? What does the midwife tell us to do? Breathe! And then? Push!"

Gracious and life-giving God, you equipped the disciples to feed over 5,000, grant us the courage to take a deep breath and push with all our might for a world where we live out our baptismal promises to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being. Amen.

¹ The Rev. Dr. Clifton Kirkpatrick [Feasting on the Word, Year A](#) p543

² The Rev. Dr. Dock Hollingsworth [Feasting on the Word, Year A](#) p549

³ Matthew 14:19

⁴ Lenny Duncan [Dear Church](#) p13

⁵ Lenny Duncan [Dear Church](#) p16

⁶ Lenny Duncan [Dear Church](#) p13

⁷ Valerie Kaur [See No Stranger: A Memoir and manifesto of Revolutionary Love](#) p xiii