



CONCORD SUNDAY SCHOOL

LESSON 31

SUNDAY,
AUGUST 2, 2020

Matthew 14:13-21 NRSV

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.

Background

This chapter is full of scandal! Right before this passage, we hear about the death of John the Baptist. Herod had John the Baptist arrested, bound and put in prison. In your own devotional period, take a look at the earlier passage in chapter 14. It is one full of intense imagery, including even a corrupt plot to murder John the Baptist and present his head on a platter as a birthday gift. Later in the passage, Jesus walks on water and heals everyone who touches the “fringe of his cloak.” In your own devotional period this week, consider the drama of the chapter. Would you be able to focus in an environment like this?

Today's lesson will focus on being moved by the needs of the world.

Read the scripture out loud together.

Discuss with someone in your home. When was the last time you had “butterflies in your stomach?”

What's happening during this passage?

Jesus went ashore to find a crowd waiting for him. People who were sick were healed. They were here in this festival (of sorts) until evening. So the disciples suggested Jesus send folks to get takeout. Jesus did not want to send them away, and instead, compelled the disciples to feed them.

But all they had there was 5 loaves and 2 fish. Jesus asked for these items to be brought to him, and he made everyone sit on the grass. He took the food and blessed it “looking up to heaven.” He gave the food to the disciples, and the disciples distributed it among the crowds. Everybody had something to eat, and what was left over was 12 baskets of broken pieces. 5,000 men ate, but we have no clue how many others were fed as well.

Is this believable?

This story sounds like a tall tale or a story we tell at cookouts. Can five loaves and two fish really feed thousands of people? How? How much of a portion does everyone get? What about people who come for seconds, or people who take some home? How is this possible?

If you have ever hosted a barbecue, or a birthday party, it might not surprise you that food keeps flowing. Maybe as the food was distributed, people in the crowd began to share. Maybe when Jesus blessed the food, a miracle took over and multiplied the food in the baskets? Maybe some neighbors rolled up to the backyard with extra dishes. We don't know exactly how this miracle happened, but it is recorded in other gospels. Though the story is told different ways, its prominence in the written record suggests that *something unbelievable happened and someone had to tell the story.*

Where else do we see stories of abundance in the Bible?

There are many stories of overflowing cups in the Bible. Another story in the gospels is Jesus' first miracle of turning water into wine at Cana. The wine ran out,

and Mary encouraged Jesus to do his work. In 2 Kings 4, there is a story about a widow who is about to lose her children to a creditor. A prophet tells her to borrow containers from her neighbors and start pouring oil from whatever she has in her house. The oil keeps flowing, and she's able to sell that to keep her family together. And we can't forget about the Exodus account of the quail and manna that falls from the sky. This gift became sustenance for the people in the wilderness.

Abundance happens often in the Bible because we are surrounded by contrived scarcity. If we believe that God created all things and called it "good," then we must believe that there is enough on this Earth to sustain life for all living beings. The reason why so many lack homes or food is not because there is a scarcity of homes or food. The United States wastes food at unforgivable rates every year. And there are enough vacant properties in New York City to warrant the moniker of "The Sixth Borough." When the world around us makes us compete for necessary goods, we must remember that abundance and satisfaction is possible.

What started this miracle?

Early in this passage, Jesus was described as having "compassion for them." The Greek word for compassion has a connotation of "being moved to one's bowels." At this time, the bowels were thought to be the seat of love and pity. Think of how you feel when you truly miss someone, or you are excited to see someone. You may get the feeling of "butterflies" in your stomach. This bodily reaction that Jesus has to seeing the pains of the people sends him into action. Sometimes we see the pain of the world, and we feel shocked into stillness. We may feel helpless, or scared. But when we see the pain of the world, we have to let our bodies feel the sadness. We have to let ourselves cry. We can hold the pain with the World, knowing that someone is holding pain with us, too.

Imagine if Jesus did not feel "moved to compassion?" Imagine if he did not feel compelled to do something for these people? Perhaps he would have followed the disciples' advice and sent them on their way to rummage for food. Instead, Jesus felt the hunger of the people, too. When Jesus eats, we all eat.

What questions do you still have of this scripture? How will you commit to journeying with this text this week?

Connection to Today's World

In 2019, twins Zakiyyah and Khadijah Abdul-Mateen launched a program



called “Unearth and Bloom.” It is a resource for managing “breath and awareness to address trauma in the mind and body.” Recently, they’ve begun to host yoga sessions and meditations online for the community. In their own words, they are “intergenerational healers, trauma informed mental health specialists, daughters of the earth and students of our breath.” They are “committed to the complete liberation of our people.” These two licensed mental health professionals use spiritual practices (from their Muslim and Christian family) to nourish entire communities. Underneath this practice is

the very certain truth that our bodies give us information. Sometimes bodies tell us that we are hungry or tired. They also tell us when we are unsafe. They also make us take action, as Jesus does in this text.

Journal: When was the last time you were moved to do something for someone else?

Closing: Sing/watch “Precious Jesus,”

For a video, click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bz2w4ohvgyc>

Precious Jesus, how I love you.
How I lift high my voice with your praise.
Holy Spirit, I implore thee,
drench my heart as my lips part your grace.

Precious Jesus, how I love you.
How I lift high my voice with your praise.
Holy Spirit, I implore thee,
drench my heart as my lips part your grace.

I am persuaded, Lord, to love you.
I have been changed to bless your name.
I am constrained by this great gospel,
for ever to worship thee.

Prayer:

Dear God,

You gave us our senses to see the beautiful world you created. When we witness the world in front of us, we are often moved to feel things. We feel joy, sadness, excitement, fear, wonder, amazement, nervousness.

God, thank you for giving us a heart to feel. Sometimes feelings can take a toll on our spirits, so grant us comfort and peace as we witness all that is around us.

Most of all, Lord, help us to never turn away from the trouble of the world. We cannot be superheroes, but we also cannot be villains. Don't let us get so comfortable that we refuse to acknowledge other people's needs.

In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen

Works Cited:

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?t=kjv&strongs=g4697>
<https://www.instagram.com/unearthandbloom/>