

## RESPONDING TO THE KNOCK (DIVINE MULTIPLICATION)

### Matthew 14:13-21

#### Intro

One of the things that became very obvious as I looked over the passage for this morning was that regardless of how the passage is able to stand by itself in terms of the story it tells and the theological truths that it intimates; it does not exist in a vacuum.

In fact, when we are able to look back at the events that led up to this very familiar story, we are left with an even greater appreciation for the events that took place.

To begin with Jesus has just had to deal with being rejected in his hometown of Nazareth. He went there to teach in the local synagogue, but instead of being impressed at one of their own being able to illuminate the scriptures so well, they instead “took offense at him” because there was no way that man who was born of such low estate as being ‘a carpenter’s son’ could ever be so wise.

It is on the heels of this denunciation that Jesus’ cousin, John the Baptist, is murdered by Herod in order to fulfill a promise that Herod made to his niece. And, as we know, this killing was particularly gruesome in that John was beheaded. Our passage begins as the information of this death is relayed to Jesus.

Much as you would expect, especially as he is still recovering emotionally from being turned away by his neighbors in Nazareth, Jesus takes the news of John’s killing incredibly hard and he does what many of us have done: he heads off, by himself to try and find some solace, some relief, some answers in the quiet of a deserted place.

The people from the surrounding towns also hear of John’s beheading and began to walk to the place where Jesus has told the disciples he will come ashore. It is in the pain and sorrow of that moment that Matthew recounts the miraculous feeding of the five thousand men (which actually means there were some 12 to 20 thousand people who were actually there).

The amazingly wonderful thing about this miraculous story is that it starts out with something so small (especially when you consider that what was needed to stretch to take care of so many). Now Matthew is unique in that the one who brings the offering is not a young boy, as we hear in other accountings. From my perspective, this actually opens the door to entry into these verses because you, me, any of us could be responsible for bring forth some portion of what is offered to Jesus. So imagine: imagine what it must have felt like to know that it was from your meager offering that all of those people are fed till they were full...and then the leftovers were collected. Imagine what it must have felt like.

Now imagine how that sort of multiplication might take place today and how that will change the world. The scripture reads this way.

## **Matthew 14:13-21**

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus heard this (that John the Baptist had been killed), 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. <sup>14</sup> When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. <sup>15</sup> 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." <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." <sup>17</sup> They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." <sup>18</sup> And he said, "Bring them here to me." <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. <sup>21</sup> And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

### **"Responding to the Knock (Divine Multiplication)"**

This morning's scripture lesson is one of those places in the Bible where good, God-fearing people, disagree.

Here's what I mean.

I would say that a majority of people talk about this passage as if Jesus was a magician: where he looked up to the sky, waves his hands over the five loaves and the two fish, and poof, you've got enough to feed thousands and thousands of people. I certainly remember hearing that understanding during my days as a student in a classroom, and I very much have heard that through the years as a pastor.

And I'm okay with the miraculous interpretation. I believe that miracles take place. I believe that Jesus and the disciples and people throughout the millennia who have been filled with the power of the Holy Spirit have been conduits through which the miraculous was able to take place. I believe that.

In the same breath, another theological interpretation that absolutely exists in regard to this story says that when the great assembled throng saw an individual or maybe a few individuals turn over their dinner to the one whom they were looking to as the possible messiah, that the people who were watching had their hearts transformed (dare I say, healed?), so instead of holding on to that which they had for themselves, they began to reveal and share the resources that they carried so that not only were they filled, but so were their neighbors, and their neighbors neighbors, and the neighbors of the neighbors of the neighbors (you get the point).

In either case a miracle occurred.

In the one case, it was a water into wine situation.

In the other, people stepped beyond their 'focused on self' tendencies to care for one another in a way that no one thought was possible. The disciples said to send the people away. Jesus

said, “No. You will feed them.” And the disciples, with help from an unnamed source, did exactly what Jesus said they could do. Their faith, much like the food, was multiplied. I have shared that latter interpretation in several different settings (church, classroom, Bible Study) and have received a variety of responses to it.

But there was one reaction that happened on a mission trip that I participated in more than 10 years ago, that still stands out to me today. The trip was one of the Group Mission Trips so I was serving alongside people whom I didn’t know prior to arriving there. There happened to be another adult who was a youth leader in her congregation. The look that she had on her face when I shared the possibility that the feeding of the 5000 took place in a way where the people shared what they had was akin to, “what are you talking about? The sky is blue, not green!”

But I was okay with that reaction because all I wanted to have heard was that the miraculous multiplication of God is not just limited to the water into wine side of the miracle equation. God’s love can change out hearts and when the direction of our hearts shift to a Spirit led direction, look out, because amazing and miraculous things will take place.

Well, that seed took hold in the youth leader’s mind and she talked about that with one of her fellow youth workers. She didn’t say that she believed it but she did talk about how that idea of changing hearts and those changed hearts becoming the multiplying power of God’s love really struck her.

The next day she stopped to talk about how that other youth worker spoke against that idea. This other adult was so locked into the interpretation that she believed in, that she was unable to see how the miraculous power of God could work...even through her.

What did Jesus say to his disciples? “You! You give them something to eat. I will help you, I will show you the way, but you will feed all those assembled, and feed them in the loving name of God the Father.” Miracles absolutely do happen. Sometimes the most majestic of those miracles is when someone realizes that they are loved, chosen, accepted, and empowered by God to share the love that they have first been given.

Because that sort of miracle allows multiplication to ensue.

People long to be loved and when they experience the love of God through someone who has had their heart turned (and as we’ve talked about before, that is how it has to happen for we are the hands and feet of God, we are the disciples who are called to go out and feed the assembled throng), when a person experiences the love of God through someone who has had their heart turned around, they will also have their hearts transformed, and they in turn will long to go out and share that love. It might not be a huge shift...but a shift will begin to take place

One to another, to another, to another.

But you’ve got to be willing to share it. You’ve got to be willing to take that first step to share what you have, what you have been blessed with. You’ve got to be willing to allow yourself to become part of an equation that allows the love and grace of God to be multiplied into the world.

I have no problem admitting that I have never experienced a miracle on the scale of the fishes and the loaves,...but I have been able to experience how the Spirit of God is able to work through individuals so as to allow amazing things to be able to happen.

Think about it: we have seen it, or at least heard about it happening in the midst of mission trip experiences as one person's efforts to give of everything they have inspire another, which inspire another to the point that amazing amounts of work are able to be completed. We certainly felt that over in Noxen as one yard expands to two, as all the work that is set before us is listed as 'Done'. I've seen that happen on the mission trips where over 50 homes in a community are repaired. We've participated and seen the effects of one giving to another in Haiti where the concept of 'not a hand out but a hand up' has been lived out. But to get it going, you have to take a step, a step of faith.

I've seen it as families who are in need (many times without even asking!) begin to receive the food, childcare, money and absolutely presence because one person recognize that there was a place, that there was a space that God might be able to step into. One person puts out the request, a few respond which inspire a few more to give, if not in this way, then another. But to get it going, there had to be that first response.

I've heard of medical bills that were once thought of as too large to possible pay for, paid because a group of people rallied together and asked for help from the greater community. But it had to start with one person recognizing and articulating the need.

An assembled multitude fed, homes repaired, communities transformed, crises allayed, and most importantly loved shared. That love, when that first step is taken, inspires others to give in kind, and when that first step happens, the miraculous can begin to take place.

The question that I have is will you be willing to take that risk, take that chance, and allow the miraculously multiplying love of God to flow through you? It can happen. It will happen, if you are willing to allow God to work through you. There is a knocking at the door: will you respond?

God has called us, like the disciples were called before us, to care for the people of God. We, like those disciples, wonder how that will be possible. The wonderful thing is, again we, like those disciples, will be able to see how God's love is able to multiply if we are willing to take that risk and serve.

The opportunities will come knocking. They might not be all that loud, and the scenario out of which that knock comes might not be the easiest (remember all of the difficulties that led up to the feeding of the five thousand) but the knocks will be there.

Be willing to open that door because when you do, not only will you be filled and lifted up, but a multiplication situation will absolutely evolve. Trust in the miraculous power of God. It is at work and it is at work in and through each and every one of us.

After Sermon Prayer

Holy and gracious God, through the movement of Your Spirit, Your love is able to move through us so that our actions might become the opening step of a multiplication situation. Lord, help us

to take that risk so that Your will might be done, Your love might be shared, and Your kingdom is built in the here and now. Lord, hear our prayer. Amen.