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Fed by God
Matthew 14:13-21

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**.

Have you ever been so tired and overwhelmed
That you didn't know if you could keep going?

Have you ever been struggling,
With too many people who need you,
Too many responsibilities,
And too many problems to overcome?

Maybe you are trying to juggle
a grueling job, a sick family member,
a child with extra needs, a perilous financial situation,
And then something at home breaks,
And you feel like you might have a nervous breakdown—
Ever been there?

Or maybe you are walking through a season of grief,
And extra hours of work,
Extra stresses of family,
And extra demands on your time?

Ever felt that way?

If so, Jesus knows exactly how you feel.

He too was tired, and overwhelmed.

He was faced with too many people needing him,

Too many responsibilities,

Too many problems,

So he goes away by himself, to pray.

Jesus has been preaching non-stop about the kingdom of heaven.

He's been healing dozens of people.

Then, his cousin and dear friend, John the Baptist is killed

By an evil and insecure ruler named Herod,

threatened by John's ministry and power.

John was preaching and teaching and baptizing people all over the region,

He was warning them to turn back to God,

And Herod was threatened by all of it.

Matthew says: *Though Herod wanted to put John to death, he feared the crowd, because they regarded John as a prophet.* ⁶ *But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company, and she pleased Herod* ⁷ *so much that he promised to grant her whatever she might ask.* ⁸ *Prompted by her mother, she said, "**Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter.**"* ⁹

And Herod did it.

Then John's disciples came for his body, and went to tell Jesus.

So, in addition to feeling tired and overwhelmed,

Jesus was grieving for John,

And likely facing his own mortality.

Jesus then goes away to a DESERTED place by himself.

The word for ***deserted place*** is important—it's the Greek word *eremos*.

Which means a solitary, desert or wilderness place.

Which ***echoes many famous stories*** in the Bible—

Like the 40 years the Israelites wandered in the desert

Or Elijah fleeing Jezebel.

Or Jesus, tempted for 40 days in the wilderness.

For God's people, the ***desert or wilderness is a place of***

wandering, testing, and temptation.

It's a *liminal place*---a place of transition.

But it is also a place of TRANSFORMATION.

A place *where God does amazing things!*

The Israelites received bread from heaven in the wilderness,

Elijah hears from God.

Jesus is fed by angels after his temptation.

So when Jesus withdraws to a deserted place,

He knows that not only will he be able to pray,

He will also be fed, and sustained by God,

Just like all of his ancestors in the faith.

So keep that in mind, as we hear this story

Jesus goes away for prayer, peace and quiet,

And is followed by thousands, clamoring for preaching and healing.

Then the disciples point out,

That the crowds are likely hungry!

I know that I'm not happy when I go away for peace and quiet.

To be all alone with God,

And suddenly people show up, who need me.

Who demand my attention.

Jesus responds differently.

He has compassion on them, so he heals the sick.

When his disciples urge him to send the crowds away

Jesus tells his disciples:

*"They need not go away; **you** give them something to eat."*

*They replied, "We have **nothing** here but five loaves and two fish."*

And he said, "Bring them here to me."

Did you catch that?

They say: we have NOTHING here.

Nothing.

Isn't that how WE feel when we are tired, worn out, grieving,

And overwhelmed by life and all the demands upon us?

That we have NOTHING left...NOTHING to give?

That's exactly how the disciples felt when they saw crowds surrounding them and closing in on them.

In another Gospel we read about a small boy with 5 loaves and 2 fish but here in Matthew, the disciples THEMSELVES show Jesus what THEY have. JUST five loaves and two fish. Not even enough to feed the 13 of them, right?

And you know, when Jesus says 'YOU FEED THEM' the disciples are like... Really, Jesus? Are you sure? We can't even give everyone a crumb out here. And, if we did give away our food, what will WE eat?

Jesus is challenging them to trust God, And they are fixated on what little they have to offer! Jesus wants them to focus on God's provision, and abundance, And they are completely focused on their scarcity!

How often are WE the VERY SAME WAY? How many times have you said—there are not enough hours in the day, Or days in the week. I don't have the time, the energy. I don't have the talent for that....It's not my forte.

How many times have we wondered, How can my SMALL GIFT make a DIFFERENCE? Isn't this going to be just a drop in the bucket? Maybe someone else should handle this, Why should I bother, I don't have enough for myself as it is.

It's funny that the disciples have that reaction, And they literally heard Jesus preach the parables before this! They heard him talking about the kingdom of heaven being like a tiny mustard seed growing to the largest shrub, or like a priceless pearl worth selling everything to have.

And they STILL DON'T GET IT. Just like we don't get it today!

And we have read about Jesus' miracles, and the whole story of faith in the Bible!
We know how it all turns out,
and we still doubt God's goodness!

Jesus is not just about to do a miraculous feeding,
He is about to **EMBODY** *what he wants all of his followers to know---*
that our is a God of **abundance**, especially when we see only scarcity.
And our God is the God of the impossible!
The God who specializes in those situations when we have come to the end
of who we are and what we have.

When those disciples say that they have 'NOTHING'.....that's us.
That's us at the end of our rope.
That's us when we are overwhelmed and worn out,
And doubting that we have anything important to give.

That's us when we see a dwindling bank account,
Or a broken relationship,
Or an endless calendar of responsibilities,
And we throw our hands up in the air.

That's us when we cry out to God:
I have nothing left.

That's actually the CRUX of this story.
It's not just about people getting fed with bread and fish,
And 12 baskets left over!
This is about us coming to the **END OF OURSELVES**,
And our ability to manage things,

The story is about Jesus taking over, Jesus feeding, Jesus caring.
And on the Lord's Table over there,
Is the KEY to it all.

The disciples give five loaves and two fish to Jesus.
He TAKES it,
BLESSES it,
BREAKS it,
And GIVES it back to them,
so they can give it to the hungry crowd!

*Having been blessed by Jesus,
The disciples are able **TO BLESS** a crowd of thousands.
So much, that there are baskets of food leftover!*

*That's what we **BELIEVE** about Jesus.
He takes what we have to offer,
What we surrender,
What we consider insignificant,*

*And he blesses it, breaks it open, and gives it back to us....
That we might share it with others.*

*Taken, Blessed, Broken and Given.
That's what happens at the **Lord's Supper**.
Jesus **TOOK** the bread, **BLESSED** it, **BROKE** it, and he **GAVE** it to them.*

*Why?
Not just to feed them on that night of Passover.
But to **TRULY FEED** them.
To **FILL** them, that they might go and fill others.*

*He gave it to them as a **BLESSING**,
That they might bless the world around them.*

*The same is true for **US**.
Jesus takes ---our time, talent, and treasures,
No matter what the size,
Or how insignificant it seems to us,*

*And he **BLESSES** it.
Then he **BREAKS** it,
(in other words, he makes sure we know we are broken,
and insufficient on our own),
Then he **GIVES those things back to us**,
That we might **GIVE** to others, in his name.*

*The **kingdom of heaven** that Jesus preached,
He also lived.*

And in his life *we see God's kingdom of blessing, and abundance,*
not scarcity or fear.

The kingdom of God is one of LOVE, overflowing, endless love.

Herod's kingdom was based on fear, and scarcity,

Just like the kingdoms of our world today.

Where everyone is trying to hang on to what they have,
lest we not have anything at all.

But Jesus calls us to live in the WORLD OF ABUNDANCE,

Of endless blessing,

Of self-giving, self-sacrificing love.

The truth is: God's math is NOT OUR MATH.

When we give our time, talent or treasure away in the name of Jesus,

We don't have LESS.....we actually GAIN MORE!

Jesus is not about power or hoarding.

He is about *people and giving.*

He is moved by compassion those in need.

Even in his grief and exhaustion,

he does not turn away from those around him.

Which means, that even in our grief and exhaustion,

We don't have to turn away from others either.

Because we follow Jesus.

The one who *provides.*

The one who can take a lunchbox of five loaves and two fish,

And feed 5000 people.

All by *taking, blessing, breaking and giving* it back to us.

Where the disciples saw *ONLY 7 pieces* of food,

Jesus saw *7 pieces of food*—7, the number of wholeness,

just like in the story of God's creation!

The miracle is FAR BIGGER than feeding 5000 people!

The miracle is Jesus using the disciples,

And what little they had to offer,

To share food and love.

The miracle is *Jesus' LOVE*, and God's *PROVISION*.
 The miracle is what happens when OUR time, talent and treasure
 Is surrendered to Jesus.

What does it mean to YOU that *the disciples feed the people*?
 Aren't *WE the disciples*?
 Aren't we called to believe in
God's abundance, NOT the myth of scarcity?

It's NOT EASY.

When we see a *lunchbox*, we don't usually try to feed a *crowd*.
 When we see a small *bank statement*,
 we don't usually assume it can change countless lives.

But it can!

For *we are the body of Christ on earth today*.
 We are called to give what we have to Jesus.....
 and he can and will work miracles!

Sure, it's not easy.
 We want to *hoard and save*,
We want to doubt what God can do.

But what if we could TRUST in the goodness of God?

What if we were to eat the Lord's Supper today,
 And ask Jesus to USE US—*take us, bless us, break us, and use us*.
 That is the *Good News of the Gospel*.
We are fed by God, that we might feed one another.
 And for this, all God's people can say together, Amen