

Pentecost 9
Aug 2, 2020

Isaiah 55:1-5

"Come, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
²Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
³Incline your ear, and come to me;
hear, that your soul may live;
and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.
⁴Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.
⁵Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know,
and a nation that did not know you shall run to you,
because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

Psalms 145:8-9, 14-21

⁸ The LORD is gracious and full | of compassion,*
slow to anger and | of great kindness.
⁹ The LORD is loving to | everyone*
and his compassion is over | all his works.

¹⁵ The LORD upholds all | those who fall;*
he lifts up those who | are bowed down.
¹⁶ The eyes of all wait upon | you, O LORD,*
and you give them their food | in due season.
¹⁷ You open | wide your hand*
and satisfy the needs of every | living creature.
¹⁸ The LORD is righteous in | all his ways*
and loving in | all his works.
¹⁹ The LORD is near to those who call | upon him,*
to all who call up- | on him faithfully.
²⁰ He fulfills the desire of | those who fear him;*
he hears their | cry and helps them.
²¹ The LORD preserves all | those who love him,*

but he destroys | all the wicked.
²² My mouth shall speak the praise | of the LORD;*
let all flesh bless his holy name forev- | er and ever.

Romans 9:1-5

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— ²that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers,^[a] my kinsmen according to the flesh. ⁴They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. ⁵To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

Matthew 14:13-21

¹³Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. ¹⁵Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." ¹⁶But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." ¹⁷They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish." ¹⁸And he said, "Bring them here to me." ¹⁹Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. ²¹And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

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Bread in the Wilderness

Throughout the scriptures, the notion or concept of a desolate place has been used to convey a variety of experiences. For the psalmist, it's often a place for quiet reflection or meditation. For the prophets, it was sometimes a place that characterized rejection and defeat. Desolate places symbolized hardship and challenge. And for the Lord Jesus, it was the location for his time of testing and temptation by the devil.

In this morning's reading, Jesus has gone to a desolate place – the wilderness – out of profound grief. The scriptures read simply, "When Jesus heard this, he withdrew to a desolate place by himself." What did he hear that caused him to withdraw to the wilderness? If you were to look back to the first 12 verses of this chapter of Matthew, you would discover that Jesus has just learned about the beheading of his cousin, John the Baptist, by Herod. The fiery young contemporary of Jesus, the one who baptized him in the Jordan, the one who leaped in his mother's womb when Mary visited Elizabeth, the one with whom so much of his destiny was linked, has been gruesomely executed in prison.

Upon learning of John's fate, Jesus has tried to go off and be by himself. Like all of us, he needed a little down-time to process the events, to grieve the loss of that voice that had cried in the wilderness...

So it was that he tried to retreat for a while to mourn, to grieve, and to reflect on the similar path on which he was embarking. This would not end well!

But arriving at what he hoped would be a spot for him to be alone, he found that a huge crowd had arrived there before him and was waiting expectantly. Why had they come? What were they doing here? One might think that they came expecting to be fed. But there was no precedent for such an expectation. This would be the first miracle of feeding a multitude.

The scriptures say that when the crowd learned what Jesus had heard, they followed him. Some might have come in an effort to console Jesus in his loss. But perhaps more likely they came out of their own inner turmoil. John had been well known, and well liked. They were worried: if Herod could do this to such a powerful figure, one who had stood up to the religious leaders, what hope remained for them? To whom could they turn now? They were confused and afraid, sick and saddened. All they knew for sure was that Jesus was out there, and something compelled them to go where he was...

And so they came...

Along with wilderness stories, the scriptures tell us of the significance of bread. Abraham has Sarah bake 12 loaves of bread for their three mysterious visitors. The prophet Elijah miraculously sustains a widow and her son with bread made from a supply of flour and oil that did not run out;

And sometimes bread and wilderness stories run together. Out in the wilderness, Jesus in his hunger was tempted to turn stones into bread, and we hear Jesus tell us that we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. The children of Israel were given bread from heaven – manna – to sustain them in their years in the wilderness. And in our story today, Jesus takes bread, gives thanks and breaks it and gives it to the crowd...

Jesus and the crowds were driven to the desolate wilderness by the horrific deeds of a political despot. Herod's actions juxtaposed with those of Jesus create a stunning contrast. Herod throws a decadent party; the finest of food and wine flowed freely. Yet from this surplus supply, Herod reacts out of fear of the crowd around him and it leads to death. Jesus, with a scarcity of resources – a meager five loaves and two fish – responds to the crowd around him with compassion and it leads to life and health and wholeness!

It is in our own wilderness that Jesus – the bread of life – comes to us. Grieved by the death of our loved ones, hounded by sickness that lays waste, confused by betrayal of friends, afraid of things we cannot understand, once again out of compassion, Jesus brings us his own body and blood – bread for our journey. For us, just as he did for the crowd, Jesus lifts up his eyes, blesses the bread and breaks it:

All around us are crowds grieving the same losses that Jesus suffered and that we experience. And just as he did 2000 years ago, now he turns to us, his disciples who have had a foretaste of the feast to come and says, to us, "Now, you give them something to eat!"

**Prayers of the Church,
9th Sunday after Pentecost, August 2, 2020**

Let us pray for the church, the world, and all people according to their need.
A brief silence is kept.

Heavenly Father, thank you for daily bread that nourishes soul and body.
Thank you for the Bread of Life, Jesus your Son. Give us this bread always.
Help us share with those who are famished.
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Feed your Church with the Bread of Heaven. Refresh it with living water.
Heal it with the wine of forgiveness. Nourish it with the milk of your
kindness. Then, send the Church into the world, to invite those who do not
yet know you to drink from the waters of salvation and feast on the bread of
life.
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for Christians around the world who are imprisoned and killed
because they name Jesus as Lord. Bestow on them your steadfast love and,
so that they may be bold, faithful, and gracious in their witness to their
Savior. Help us to serve, defend and provide for them however we can.
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Make the people of this congregation hungry for your truth and thirsty for
your mercy. Let us feast upon Jesus in Word and Sacrament. And then,
make us overflow with holy love, so we eagerly share him with those who
need it most.
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

There are so many hungry people! Bless every food pantry, community
garden, meal program, and aid organization that feeds the hungry. Help us
to endow poor communities with skills and resources, to feed themselves
and be a blessing to many others.
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Teach the leaders of the nations to incline their ears to you; to rightly lead
their people; and to seek that good which endures. Give them the desire and
the means to provide food, jobs, education, and safety for those entrusted
to their care. And grant to all people those good things which sustain life and
hope.
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Jesus' disciples learned his power by obeying his command to feed the
people. We are his disciples, too. We're sometimes overwhelmed by the size

of the task: so many hungry, hurting people! And we're daunted by our resources: we're so small, old, limited, untutored! Give us the obedient hearts of the first disciples. Help to follow Jesus by little steps: Sitting, praying, listening, sharing, gathering. Remind us that Jesus will take, break, and bless our small gifts, and use them to feed a world starved for him. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Grant refreshment, strength, and healing to everyone who struggles with any sort of adversity. Especially we lift before you the needs of : Dallas & Mary Rathe, Marilyn Fredrick, Rosemary Pelvatier, Terri Gould, Xavier Roach, Leta (Oelrich) Schroeder, the VansCoy family, Pastor David Steffenson, and Pastor James Puotyual. Give compassion and competence to all who care for them. And hasten the day when they may joyfully say, "You remembered us in our low estate, for your mercy endures forever; and delivered us from our enemies, for your mercy endures forever." Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, keep in your care all who have died trusting in your promises. Turn our sorrow into joy, and our tears to laughter. Have compassion on us and especially on the family and friends of Ivanelle Bushaw. Nourish, sustain, guide, and protect us. Teach us to care for each other tenderly. Gather us around your Son, to receive every good gift from his wounded hands. Let him lead us, and all your people, to the festal table you have prepared. There may we eat and drink and gaze upon him, our heart's desire, forever. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**