

God turns “next to nothing” into more than enough

I always feel exhausted after hearing this passage from Matthew. Maybe because I relate to the Disciples who have the task of feeding all those people. Or because I feel for Jesus who recently has been rejected by his hometown and just learned of John the Baptist’s beheading by Herod. He is hurting. He’s grieving. He needs some time to process what has happened, so he goes away to a quiet place. Yet, there is this crowd of people who need him. They are hurting and worried and looking for hope. They have heard that Jesus can heal them and that he speaks of a new kingdom, a better life.

This is how I imagine it happens. A few people see Jesus and his friends getting into a boat to cross the lake. They have heard about this man who heals and teaches. Let’s follow him!

As a few people start around the lake others wonder what’s up and start to follow also. They call to their friends and their families to come and see. We do this too. We see flashing lights beside the road and slow down to look. We see a crowd of people gathered in the park and wander over to see what’s up. We are drawn to discover what is going on.

Think of yourself in the mass of people walking towards Jesus. I know I would be talking to the people around me, enjoying the excitement of something out of the ordinary. I feel the warmth of the sun and smell and see the dust rising up from the path from all the feet walking along.

And then there is Jesus climbing out of the boat, looking at us. His eyes are sad, but he smiles and stretches out his arms towards us. As we watch he moves among us stopping to comfort an old man, hug a little child, speak with the mother, wipe tears from another’s face. His compassion for the people moves him to act and to forget his own needs.

Then he walks up to me. The way he looks into my eyes makes me feel that he truly sees me, that he knows me and cares for me. It is in that brief moment of connection that I understand why the people have followed him. We all want to be close to this person who cares so deeply for us.

No one wants to leave. But finally, it’s getting late and I see the disciples talking with Jesus. Are they going to send us away? I’m getting hungry, but I’m not ready to leave. Then the disciples hand Jesus some bread and what looks like a couple of dried fish. I watch as Jesus thanks God for the food, hands it back to his friends and tells them to give the food to us. They do. I am given a piece of bread and a bit of fish. So, are the people near me. I look

around and see that everyone has something to eat. I'm amazed and thankful. My heart and my belly have been filled. I'm no longer tired or worried or hungry. I'm filled with energy and excitement. I see the people around me with new eyes. They are like me, delighted and amazed by what has happened. We look at each other with joy. And as we begin to return to our villages and homes, we know we will never be the same. By Jesus' acts of healing and feeding we have been shown what it means to care for each other.

In our time the pandemic has sapped the energy from many of us. It has from me, because everything is different. Even the simplest of tasks feels harder. They take more time and energy to accomplish. There are times when I feel like I have next to nothing to give to you or my family or even to myself.

Like the disciples we may feel like we have next to nothing to give to the hungry, hurting world. And that is God's favorite place to work with us! It is when we get to the point of nothing left, when we surrender ourselves to the God who loves us, because there is nothing else we can do except to say, "O God, make speed to save us, O Lord, make haste to help us." That is when there is space where we are open enough for God to come in and fill us up. "You only have a bit of bread and fish," asks God? "Watch as I make that more than enough."

This is what it is like to live in the world God would give us. That world, the kingdom of God, comes when you feel irresistibly drawn to live, move and have your being in God's love for you every day. In the kingdom of heaven, there is compassion, people share their resources, and there is more than enough for everyone.

Today be like the people in our story. Follow Jesus. Listen. Watch. Be healed. Sit and be fed. Jesus doesn't turn us away when we are tired and empty, when we feel like we have next to nothing to give to anyone.

Jesus has compassion for us and invites us to sit and eat with him. Jesus fills us up and turns our next to nothing into enough. Enough compassion, enough love, enough energy and motivation to act and care for each other.

Today let God surround you with love and fill you up.

