Matthew 14:13-21

"This lesson invites us to remember our own wildernesses, our own places of chaos, when our own insufficiencies may have been blessed, broken, and given away. And yet it was precisely in risking that impossible insufficiency that there was enough. Indeed, more than enough."

Listed on The Text This Week, www.textweek.com: Contemporary Commentary, Studies, and Exegesis for the Gospel reading.

Year A
Pentecost 7
July 31, 2011
Sunday Between July 31 and August 6 Inclusive
Proper 13, Ordinary Time 18


Click here, Matthew 14:13-21, for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this note.

Sermon by the Rev. Dr. George Hermanson, “.”

The real miracle today would be for the feeble scraps of our sermons on the text to truly feed and satisfy the hungry who have gathered.

As I have said before, the key thing with any "miracle" story is to NOT get distracted by the special effects. The text does not explain how these things happen; nor should the sermon. But the text does explain why these things happen and invites us to be open to mystery and wonder, the strange and the impossible possible.

I would suggest taking a day or two just to feel one's way into the full meaning of Verse 13:

When Jesus heard the news about John ...

"The news about John" is that he has been beheaded; killed as the result of jealousy and a foolish promise. And who is John to Jesus? Scholars suggest that John was Jesus' spiritual teacher / mentor. That before beginning his own public ministry, Jesus had been a follower of John.

According to Matthew, Jesus had just been rejected by his own town, Nazareth (Matthew 13:53-58); then John is executed (Matthew 14:1-12); and then

Jesus left and went in and went to a lonely place by himself.
Good News Bible

So we begin this passage with Jesus rejected and grieving.
But when his boat arrives at the lonely place, he finds a large crowd has followed him on the shore. Jesus' heart is filled with compassion, with pity for them.

It is important to note that the crowds' behavior is an act of trust and risk on their part. They too have left behind their homes and trekked out into the wilderness.

What follows invites us to remember other wildernesses, and another "miraculous" feeding: Moses and the manna (Exodus 16).

What follows invites us to remember our own wildernesses, our own places of chaos, when our own insufficiencies may have been blessed, broken, and given away. And yet it was precisely in risking that impossible insufficiency that there was enough. Indeed, more than enough.

How many is 5,000 men, plus women and children?

This is not a trick question.

Bruce Malina (Page 81, see footnote below.) comments that:

* A crowd of five thousand males would have been larger than the entire population of all but a handful of the very largest urban settlements. Matthew's image is that of a whole city in Jesus' entourage, whom Jesus nourishes out of compassion.

Rejection, grief, compassion, risk, trust, impossible insufficiency, enough and more than enough.

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Historical background information in this post is drawn primarily from Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, see link below, pages 80-81.

* Link to Amazon.com Bibliography for Bruce Malina, et. al., Social Science Commentary on ... The Synoptic Gospels; The Gospel of John; The Book of Acts; The Letters of Paul; The Book of Revelation; and others.

**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.

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Matthew 14:31-21 (The Message)

13 When Jesus got the news, he slipped away by boat to an out-of-the-way place by himself. But unsuccessfully—someone saw him and the word got around. Soon a lot of people from the nearby villages walked around the lake to where he was. 14 When he saw them coming, he was overcome with pity and healed their sick.

15 Toward evening the disciples approached him. "We're out in the country and it's getting late. Dismiss the people so they can go to the villages and get some supper."

16 But Jesus said, "There is no need to dismiss them. You give them supper."

17 "All we have are five loaves of bread and two fish," they said.

18 Jesus said, "Bring them here." 19 Then he had the people sit on the grass. He took the five loaves and two fish, lifted his face to heaven in prayer, blessed, broke, and gave the bread to the disciples. The disciples then gave the food to the congregation. 20 They all ate their fill. They gathered twelve baskets of leftovers. 21 About five thousand were fed.