

C Narrative 48
August 6, 2017
Poulsbo
Pastor Alison Shane

Luke 9:1-17

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

This text is about community and discipleship. I know it seems like the feeding of the 5000 (which was probably more like feeding 15,000 if you include women and children) is a story about a miracle of Jesus, but when it's put in its context of sending out the disciples to be reliant on the hospitality of others, it's really about what God does for us and what it therefore means to be the community of Christ.

In Christ through baptism, God welcomes us into the family of God, into community. Just as Jesus proclaimed good news, healed and cured all in need, and fed those who were hungry, in this family of God, God continues to proclaim good news to you, heal you, and feed you, both spiritually in this place, but also physically, tangibly through the people around you. As the family of God, we receive God's good gifts and we are called to carry on Jesus' work of welcoming, proclaiming, healing, and feeding.

This can be difficult for us in the Pacific Northwest. Hospitality (welcoming, healing, feeding) is not a normal part of our culture, and some would even say it's not in our DNA. Patricia Killen, who pioneered the study of the None Zone of the Pacific Northwest points out that the geography around us, while captivating and enjoyable, is also inhospitable. Everywhere we turn, nature threatens to kill us, from the threat of water to the threat of a fall from a mountain. It took a certain type of person to tackle this land as it was being settled, and Killen's research found that that type of person was by and large a hardscrabble loner, not prone to hospitality. These are our ancestors. It's in our DNA. My grandfather was one of those who made that trek a generation after the gold rush. He married a wonderful, hospitable woman, and he would put up with her determination to invite people over for dinner, but not long into the after-dinner conversation, my grandfather was known to say, "Well, honey, let's go to bed so the company can go home." It's in our DNA.

But community is also in our DNA. God created us for it, and God gathers us into it. Respected theologians and biblical scholars Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, Walter Bruggeman, and Diane Jacobson have this to say:

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God calls us into community so that we might know God, and God uses that community to heal us, feed us, and otherwise love on us. And God calls us in that community to do his work for others: to welcome, to heal, to feed, to love. If I asked you what Jesus did in his time on earth, would you not say healing? In Jesus' culture, to heal was not merely to cure someone of a physical disease. It was to restore them to community. Jesus spent his life restoring the outcast into community. And having been restored to God's community, God calls us to do the same.

This particular body of God's family has stretched itself to answer this call. We have welcomed a homeless man not only into our midst but into our carport, and we have struggled to figure out how best to help him as in recent months, some sort of issues began to manifest in hoarding. But through it, we have sought to continue to love him, to make sure he is fed, to

welcome him in all ways into this body. Now, as he struggles with incarceration, we continue to love him. We pray for him, we visit him, we support him as Christ has called us to do. We bring community to him. And when he is more fully restored to this community, we will continue to seek healing for him.

As I spoke with Don this week (and I asked if I might share this with you), he said he's been spending his time reading the Daily Bread devotions and reading scripture. I asked what he's finding in scripture, and he said, "Honesty and truth, but what really spoke to me was Emmanuel. God is with us. God is with me."

Don is relying on the promises he heard proclaimed here, relying on a God he knows is with him always, a God who has forgiven him and who is urging him to be honest and penitent. And he is relying on this community to be for him through it all.

We respond to God's call to community, to welcome, to proclaim, to feed, to heal, to love. And sometimes we find ourselves stretched. We as a congregation continue to do God's work in this community, healing and feeding and welcoming, and each year we strive to do more. Which means that you individuals within God's community here strive to give more so we can accomplish more.

Which is hard. God showers us with abundance, but all we see is scarcity. We are afraid to give a little more because we are afraid there might not be enough for ourselves. But that's just a lack of trust in God, a lack of trust in God's community to come together and make sure that all have heard, that all are healed and welcomed, that all are fed, including you. So God calls you to be open, to see what more you can do, to give even when you think you can't, to love even when you feel resentful.

Because when we don't open up, when we don't trust God's abundance, when we don't reach out to make sure all are fed, all are healed and cured, all are welcomed, all are loved, we make God's job harder, and we make our brethren in Christ bear the burden. We put the burden on others to care for our neighbors. When we seek our own good above another's or when we expect others to care for themselves, we are actively thwarting the will of God.

Because the will of God is community, for me to provide for you and you to provide for me. The will of God is for all to be welcome. The will of God is for all to eat and be filled. The will of God is for all to be cured AND healed. And God calls us to make it so.

God gathers you here to remind you that God deals in abundance. Five loaves, two fish, 15,000 fed and twelve baskets left over. And we think there isn't enough. God deals in abundance. Jesus healed those who needed to be cured. He didn't ask if they could pay, he didn't make sure they were Jews, he didn't ask them if they'd sinned today, he didn't make sure they were REALLY part of this community. He healed those who needed to be cured.

God deals in abundance. Love so abundant it reaches even past these forbidding mountains into the Pacific Northwest. Love so abundant it reaches into even our individualistic DNA and changes us, makes us a community, and calls us to open up, to give and to serve and to love, to welcome, to feed, to heal.

Because we ourselves have experienced all that in God's community as God showers abundance on us and calls us to be in community with our neighbor.

Amen