



Sunday Devotion

August 2, 2020

Find a quiet place by yourself or with another and come to God.

HYMN SING

#326 For All the Saints

1. For all the saints who from their labors rest,
who thee by faith before the world confessed,
thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

3. O blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle; they in glory shine;
yet all are one in thee, for all are thine.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

#188 Jesus Loves Me

1. Jesus loves me! This I know,
for the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to him belong.
They are weak, but he is strong.
Yes, Jesus loves me! (3Xs)
The Bible tells me so.

2. Jesus loves me! This I know,
as he loved so long ago,
taking children on his knee,
saying, "Let them come to me."
Yes, Jesus loves me! (3Xs)
The Bible tells me so.

CALL TO WORSHIP

We are hungry, Lord! We come to church today with different types of hunger for you.

Some of us sit down at the table eagerly, because we are hungry.

Some of us have come because we know we should eat, even though we don't feel like it.

Some of us are ravenous.

And some of us have lost our appetite, and we don't even know why.

And yet you have drawn us to your welcoming table, one and all,
your arms open to embrace us just as we are.

As we settle in this morning, fill us with your presence

so that when we leave our worship today, we can leave saying,

"That is exactly what I needed!"

OPENING PRAYER

God of our hearts...here we are!

We've come with thirsty hearts, praying that your Word will satisfy us.

We come with aching hearts, praying for good news to comfort us.

We come with overflowing hearts, praying for a chance to share your love.

You, who know our hearts and hear our prayers, be with us now in this hour of worship. Amen.

HYMN #4 Holy God, We Praise Your Name

1. Holy God, we praise your name; Lord of all,

3. All apostles join the strain as your sacred

we bow before you. All on earth your scepter claim;
all in heaven above adore you.
Infinite your vast domain, everlasting is your reign.

2. Hark! The glad celestial hymn angel choirs above
are raising; cherubim and seraphim,
in unceasing chorus praising, fill the heavens
with sweet accord: "Holy, holy, holy Lord!"

CALL TO CONFESSION

The Lord is not mean-spirited or vengeful. God is gracious and merciful, always willing to listen to our prayers, and to hear our hearts. Let us join in the prayer for forgiveness admitting to our brokenness.

PRAYER OF BROKENNESS

You have given us a world of beauty, and we have spoiled it.

A world to feed us, and so many go hungry.

A world of riches, and we are unwilling to share.

A world to care for, and we think only of ourselves.

Forgive us, gracious God,

for those times your heart is saddened by our selfishness;

for those times we have no thought for others, no cares but ours.

Enable us to see this world anew as a gift from you, to be shared and nurtured,

and those who live upon it to be loved and cared for. Amen

WORDS OF GRACE AND FORGIVENESS

You are a child of God. You are made in the image of God, carefully created to bring God's light and love into this world. Even when you go astray of God's intention, God is here to help you find your way back. God's love is steadfast forever, and there is nothing you can do to change that. So accept that you are beloved of God because Jesus died for you. Jesus forgives you. Jesus loves you. Jesus is good to you. Amen.

FIRST SCRIPTURE LESSON Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21

⁸ The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. ⁹ The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

¹⁴ The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down. ¹⁵ The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. ¹⁶ You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing. ¹⁷ The Lord is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings. ¹⁸ The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. ¹⁹ He fulfills the desire of all who fear him; he also hears their cry, and saves them. ²⁰ The Lord watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. ²¹ My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord, and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.

SECOND SCRIPTURE LESSON 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.

name they hallow; prophets swell the glad refrain,
and the blessed martyrs follow, and from morn to
set of sun, through the church the song goes on.

4. Holy Father, Holy Son, Holy Spirit:
three we name you, while in essence only one;
undivided God we claim you, and adoring,
bend the knee while we own the mystery.

SERMON

Two year olds. A friend of mine said that God makes them that cute so we keep them. I remember when my now ten year old grandson was approaching that notoriously challenging age and he was developing as expected – darn. The summer just before he turned two he learned the concept of “mine.” I know, it is normal, as human development goes, but oh, can it be a challenge. The good news of the development of “mine” is that it means that the individual has discovered that everything in the universe is not a part of them. The bad news is, well, let me give you an example. That summer I was living in Warrington in an apartment complex with a pool. The first time we went to the baby pool there was little girl also swimming. I had taken several pool toys for Keegan to use while we were there. The other little girl had toys as well. You know what happens when a child sees a toy belonging to another – of course, they want *that* toy. It’s new, it’s different, it’s someone else’s. When Keegan reached for the toy, the little girl snatched it back with a loud, “MINE!” I distracted Keegan with his own squishy balls. That worked. Of course, a few minutes later the little girl saw Keegan’s plastic fish and decided that what’s hers is hers but what is Keegan’s is at least community property. Her mother instructed her daughter to drop the fish and play with her own things to which I responded that Keegan was willing to share. And so it went, Keegan sharing his toys as community property, but the little girl had the corner on the market of what she brought to the pool. And that’s how it went until a few weeks later. Another little boy came to the pool, picked up Keegan’s ball and I heard from my grandson’s lips, “MINE!” (Sigh!) And so begins the struggle with sharing.

Today’s New Testament lesson is probably the ultimate story of sharing. To shed some light into this story, first I’d like to point out that while writing his Gospel, Matthew wanted to show that the kingdom of God had now arrived in the life of Jesus. He knew that it was not just a future event, but that Jesus the Messiah had brought in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew highlighted Jesus’ working miracles to show God at work. He was also concerned that the kingdom of God should grow, with outreach and mission – we hear the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, and all those parables we have read over the past few weeks. This was so they could learn to live as the people of God. Jesus was showing that this new church would be truly the people of God and would be witnesses to the world the gospel and the kingdom. This is why today’s lesson, one of the best known stories of the Bible, was included in Matthew’s Gospel. This story gives us a glimpse of creation healed and the kingdom fully realized.

As it is told there was a great crowd following Jesus. 5,000 men would mean about the same again of women and children, so possibly a crowd of around 10,000 – 15,000 people. The crowds followed Jesus on foot, going around the north end of the Sea of Galilee to cross the ford about two miles upstream to get to the place where they think Jesus was heading.

Two phrases stand out in this story, two different responses to the same problem. The crowd was huge. They have been with Jesus and the disciples all day and now at the end of the day, they are hungry. The disciples are concerned and feel responsible. They want to do something to help, but can’t think of a way to solve what feels like an insurmountable problem. So big is this issue that the other gospel writers record the disciples as saying that it would take eight months’ wages to give the people only a bite of bread. The disciples’ limited vision led them to a single solution – “Send the crowds away” so that they can go and buy bread. Obviously the disciples hadn’t heard the often-used phrase, “Be part of the answer, not just part of the problem.”

Jesus, on the other hand, knew that phrase well and was determined to teach it to his disciples. Instead of allowing them to throw up their hands in despair, or continue to harp on all the negatives, Jesus throws them right into the solution. Jesus says, “You feed them.” This may seem a bit harsh, but earlier in the Gospel, in chapter ten, Jesus sent out the Twelve with new authority to perform all sorts of wonderful things. Guess what? They did! They did things they never thought they could before. Perhaps Jesus felt the need to remind them of this – that even they can move mountains. But the disciples were still hung up, unable to think beyond the physical that is right in front of their face. Their response – “We only have five loaves and two fish.” “Bring them to me,” Jesus responds. He again refuses to give up and what follows is a great miracle, maybe the greatest and an extraordinary vision of the possibility of the goodness of God.

In all fairness to the disciples, sometimes the only answer is to bring it to Jesus. When our own resources are few or nonexistent, we are forced to rely on the Bread of Life. Once we place our bread and fish into the hands of Jesus, our resources are more than enough to meet our needs and the needs of our neighbors.

Now some say that there was no miracle involved here, but that the people in the crowd all had brought lunches with them in their pockets. When they saw the apostles starting to pass out the meager five loaves and fishes, they brought out their lunches and shared with one another.

This theory sounds like this true story. After months of hard work and years of saving, the day came for Reb and Jackay to open their own restaurant. All that was needed was the final health inspection and the issuing of their business permit. That was scheduled for first thing that morning; then “Our Place,” as they called their restaurant, would be in business. But that morning the winds and rains of Hurricane Hugo hit unexpectedly, making its way 200 miles inland to their North Carolina town. Trees were uprooted, power lines were down, homes and stores were destroyed. Reb and Jackay hurried to their restaurant. Everything was intact. A deputy sheriff pulled up and told them that their restaurant, the fire station next door, and a service station down the road were the only ones that had electricity. Reb and Jackay called the health inspector to come immediately so they could open, but because of the power outage, he couldn’t get into his office to issue the permit. No permit, no business opening. With a refrigerator stocked with 300 pounds of bacon and beef and bushels of tomatoes, lettuce, and bread, there was only one thing to do: give the food away. They told the deputy, “Tell your coworkers and other emergency people you see that we’ll have free BLTs and coffee for anybody who wants to drop by.” Soon firemen, policemen, linemen, and other workers were filing into Our Place. When the couple heard that another restaurant was scalping people by charging ten dollars for two eggs, toast, and bacon, they placed a sign in their window: FREE BLTs – FREE COFFEE. Families, travelers, and street people were welcomed. Then something began to happen. People started to clean counters and sweep floors. Volunteers took over the dishwashing from Jackay and helped Reb at the grill. Hearing about what was going on at Our Place from the local radio station, people from a neighboring town that had not been too badly hit by the storm, brought food from their freezers. Stores and dairies sent over chicken, milk and foodstuffs of all kinds. And so the long day went. Those first cups of coffee and BLTs somehow stretched to 16,000 meals. The restaurant’s small stock increased by 500 loaves of bread, cases of mayo, 350 pots of coffee, and bushels of produce.

There are similar stories told during this coronavirus pandemic. Research has shown that people have become more generous since the outbreak of the virus in the United States.

When crisis hit on that lakeshore in Galilee, the disciples’ reaction to the hungry crowd was one of anxiety. “Every tomorrow has two handles,” said Henry Ward Beecher. “We can take hold of it with the handle of anxiety or the handle of faith.” Jesus approached the problem with the handle of faith. Once Jesus started to act confidently, telling the disciples to start handing out the five loaves and two fishes, the disciples, and it seems everyone else, caught the spirit and started to pitch in to help one another.

Although scripture doesn’t tell us that’s how the miracle was performed, I like to think it could have happened just that way. Does that mean it wasn’t a miracle? I think it actually makes it a greater miracle. Isn’t it more astounding than Jesus’ feeding of the crowds with a few pieces of bread and fish is Jesus’ transforming the crowd into a community, a community united in their need for one another, in the bread they share, in the love of Christ who has brought them together? To me, that is the greater miracle. Jesus was able to get a group of people to let go of what they felt was theirs in their narrow minded thinking, and open their fists to the unknown possibility of community and “ours.” Which do you think is harder? To take five loaves and two fish to feed 10,000, or to change me to we?

Jesus empowers each one of us to embrace the power of God, to perform our own miracles of creating community when we “move the fences.”

PRAYER

As the crowds followed Jesus, eager to be filled with hope, we come this day to this place, seeking nourishments for our souls. We hunger and thirst for the word of hope and truth, but our lives are battered by anger and hostility. Our hearts are filled with concerns for family and friends, for our country and our world. We don't see how we can be of help to others. Sit us down, as Jesus seated the multitude. Calm us down, as Jesus reassured the disciples that all would receive care. Lift us up, as Jesus encouraged others to reach out in compassion. Give us hearts of confident faith in your presence, O Lord. Place your hands of healing on the many situations which we name at this time with our voices and in our hearts. [Prayer concerns are lifted up here]. Lord, we ask your merciful goodness for these situations and these loved ones. It is in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.

HYMN #837 What a Fellowship, What a Joy Divine

1. What a fellowship, what a joy divine,
leaning on the everlasting arms; what a blessedness
what a peace is mine, leaning on the everlasting arms.

2. O how sweet to walk in this pilgrim way,
leaning on the everlasting arms; O how bright the path
Grows from day to day, leaning on the everlasting arms.

Refrain: Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms;
leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms.

3. What have I to dread, what have I to fear,
Leaning on the everlasting arms? I have blessed peace
with my Lord so near, leaning on the everlasting arms.

BENEDICTION

The Spirit sends us forth to serve. Go in peace, knowing that God will always be by your side in all that you do. Go in love, offering healing and hope to others. Go in joy, that others may be lifted and inspired in service. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you always. Amen.