

Matthew 14:13-21

¹³Now 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. ¹⁴When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. ¹⁵When 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." ¹⁶Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." ¹⁷They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." ¹⁸And he said, "Bring them here to me." ¹⁹Then 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. ²⁰And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. ²¹And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

{Hymn #356: Sing Praise to God, Whose Mighty Acts.}

Sermon: Enough is Enough

Rev. Amy Klinkovsky

August 13, 2017

First Presbyterian Church, Bryan, Texas

This morning's scripture began with the phrase, "When Jesus heard this, he withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself." What is it that caused him to withdraw? It was news from the disciples that John the Baptist had been killed. And, when the crowd heard the news, they followed Jesus. And while scriptures don't say it, I imagine the great crowds who gathered ashore were watching and waiting to see how Jesus would respond.

And this morning, as pastors stand in pulpits proclaiming the gospel after this weekend when white supremacists marched on the University of Virginia campus in Charlottesville holding torches and shouting "You will not replace us; Jews will not replace us," I do not imagine, I know that great crowds are watching and waiting to see how we respond to the evil on display in the world. Let us pray.

God of Mercy. God of Light in the darkness. May the words of my mouth be words of reality, truth, justice, hope, repentance, and reconciliation. May the meditations for all our hearts be filled overflowing with love for humanity and be ever-pleasing to you. And may we live a life committed to ending systems of injustice. Amen.

So, what did the crowds who had gathered ashore experience when Jesus returned? They witnessed healing. They witnessed compassion. And, as the hour grew late—despite the urging of the disciples to send the crowds away to find food—Jesus provided nourishment for the more than 5000 gathered. And, he did so with just five loaves and two fish.

This story was so important in early Christianity that it is the only story recorded in all four Gospels. In fact, the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John have a total of six versions of the story. ¹

There also tend to generally be four schools of thought about the story of the loaves and fishes. One of those is sacramental, or the idea that in the blessing, breaking and sharing of the bread among his followers, Jesus is foreshadowing the last supper.

¹ Boring, M. E. (1994–2004). [The Gospel of Matthew](#). In L. E. Keck (Ed.), *New Interpreter's Bible* (Vol. 8, p. 325). Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Another school of thought is the straight-up miracle of the event—the belief that there were literally only five loaves of bread and two fish and Jesus was able to feed the 5000+ with only that amount.

I find myself most aligned with the “rationalistic explanation.” This approach is that this is a lesson in unselfishness—Jesus and his disciples shared the little food they had, which then encouraged others into sharing their food, so that there was enough for all. And, while this approach is labeled rationalistic, I believe it has elements of a miracle as well. Some people finding sharing incredibly difficult. During my tenure as the youth and young adult director at Brentwood Presbyterian Church, I became great friends with the music and arts director. She often said there were two kinds of people in the world: those who live their life like this (hug myself tightly) holding on to everything they have for dear life. And those who live their lives like this (expanded arms, open wide) and are willing to share who they are and what they have knowing that it belongs not to them but to God. Maybe the miracle is in encouraging an entire crowd to live not like this (hug) but like this (expanded arms).

The final imagery is that this story is not based on any particular event in the life of Jesus, but is a symbolic representation of the meaning of the Christ’s life, death and resurrection with pictures of fellowship and plenty for all.²

In other words, enough is always enough in a world where God’s people live outwardly, share, and have the interest of others at heart and in mind.

I learned from the Fletchers this morning that 60 congregants gathered here yesterday to talk about how, moving forward, you all identified today’s scripture as a key scripture for this church. What joy it is to hear that you all want to practice a faith like this: (arms outstretched).

I am also reminded of a story that was shared with me by a woman I know in Los Angeles whose life’s work is raising and managing funds for a number of non-profits. The story is legend in Jewish tradition and is attributed to Israel Costa, an Italian rabbi, printer and bookseller in the middle of the nineteenth century, who included the following story in one of his books.³ The story goes a little something like this:

Once upon a time in the land of Israel, there lived an old farmer. When he died the farmer left his land to his two sons. They divided the land evenly and built their own houses on opposite sides. The younger brother soon married and had a family. The older brother did not marry but lived alone. Both brothers remained the best of friends and often helped each other on their farms.

One year at harvest time, both brothers undertook the process of harvesting their crop. They bundled the stalks of grain into sheaves, counted them, and took them into their barns to store. (Later, they would take some of it to the market to sell.) After a long day of work, the brothers usually slept well. But on this night, the elder brother lay awake.

"It is not right," he thought, "that I should reap as much grain as my brother. He has a family to feed and I have only myself. He needs more barley to sell so that he can buy all that he needs for his family." Making up his mind to set things right, he dressed and slipped out to his barn. There he took as many sheaves as he could carry across the field to his brother's barn. Feeling better, he returned to his bed and slept well.

² Boring, M. E. (1994–2004). [The Gospel of Matthew](#). In L. E. Keck (Ed.), *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Vol. 8, pp. 325–326). Nashville: Abingdon Press.

³ https://www.ou.org/jewish_action/08/2013/whats-the-truth-about-the-legend-of-two-brothers-and-the-temple-mount/

The younger brother also had slept badly that night. He awoke and lay worrying. He too thought of his brother. "It is not right," he thought, "that I should reap as much grain as my brother. I have a family to help me, and to care for me in old age, while he works alone." So saying, he too rose, dressed, and went to his barn, not long after his brother had left. There he took as many sheaves as he could carry and walked across the fields to his brother's barn. Feeling better, he returned to his bed.

The next day the two brothers each went to their barns. They looked and looked again at their grain. There was as much there as there had been the day before. The two brothers worked again in their fields all day and did not speak of what had happened.

The next night they did the same thing. First, the older brother, taking as many sheaves of grain as he could carry to his brother's barn, and then the younger brother, narrowly missing him, did the same. Again, the next day both brothers stood in awe and counted their grain, which was as much as before they had given it away. Again, both kept their thoughts to themselves.

Then on the third night, both brothers rose late. The moon had gone down and they went to their barns. Again, they gathered as much grain as they could carry and headed out across the field to their brother's barns.

It was so dark, that they almost collided in the middle of the fields. They both stopped and peered at one another. What they saw made them smile, and then laugh. They dropped their bundles, and hugged one another for a long, long time. They promised one another that there would always be help for each other, no matter what. Then they each knelt down right there in the field, and thanked God for giving them such a thoughtful and generous brother.

Enough was enough for both brothers.

What I found interesting about this particular story, is that while it is widely circulated, in some form or another, there are some scholars who believe it to be derived from a story about two brothers who did not share with, but stole from, one another. It seems, that at some point in the oral tradition changed and people were more compelled to share the story of hope and love.

After watching the news this past week—a week that first had me terrified for the people in the Korean Peninsula and people of Guam. In my youth, I remember the fear I had about the United States going to war as we tied yellow ribbons around trees and put yellow ribbons on our cars. I desperately want to live in a world where we don't have those kinds of fears. And this weekend with the violence in Charlottesville, I found myself thinking a different kind of enough is enough. I long for and pray for peace. And, I must—we must—work for peace. Racism exists in the world today, and IT IS SIN.

Enough is enough.

We must find ways to dismantle systemic injustices.

Enough is enough.

Nelson Mandela wrote in *Long Walk to Freedom* that "No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

Love is infinite—like the loaves and fishes Jesus gave to the disciples and the disciples gave to the crowds in the story we heard today. You can give love away in droves and still have enough—enough for others and enough for yourself.

My prayer for us that this is the kind of “enough is enough” that we live into, but when sin rears its ugly head, I pray we have the courage to also say to those who spew hate: enough is enough.

Every morning the first thing I see is three pieces of art in my room two that were gifted to me by American folk artist John August Swanson. One says “Struggle for Justice” and the other says “It’s Time to Plant a Brand New World.” The third piece of art is one I purchased that says, “Let her sleep, for when she wakes, she will move mountains.” I’ll admit it. I bought that last one because I thought it gave me a really great excuse to sleep in. But, I want us to move mountains together, struggle for justice and plant that brand new world.

And since the story of the two brothers has already been rewritten once, I want to rewrite the ending of the story of the two farmers—because girls can be farmers too. So here we go. Here’s a new ending:

It was so dark, so very, very dark, that they almost collided in the middle of the fields. They both stopped and peered at one another. What they saw made them smile and laugh—not hate. They dropped their bundles, and hugged one another for a long, long time. They promised one another that there would always be help for each other, no matter what. No. Matter. What.

No matter the color of their skin.
No matter the religion they practice.
No matter the gender with which they identify.
No matter the country they call home.
No matter the people they love.
No matter the language they speak.

Then they each knelt down right there in the field, and thanked God for giving them such a thoughtful, loving, peaceful and generous humanity. And it was always enough.

Amen and amen.