

‘Broken and Blessed’  
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based on Matthew 14:13-21 (Feeding the 5000)

Please pray with me:

Gracious God, grant us your grace as we strive to live into your ways of compassionate sharing and merciful justice. Open our ears to hear and our eyes to see the miracle of your inclusive love. Amen.

“Now, when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there ... in a boat ... to a deserted place ... by himself.”

This begs the question: What did Jesus hear that made him withdraw by himself to a deserted place?

According to the Gospel writer Matthew, Jesus had just heard that his friend, mentor, cousin, and spiritual director ... had been beheaded; murdered for being a vocal prophet of God.

Jesus must have been overwhelmed by grief. Sorrow consumed him hearing that such a mighty prophet of God, as John the Baptist, would be physically disassembled and disgraced by those in power.

The injustice must have been unbearable.

I imagine Jesus broken by grief ... yet knowing the way to heal the brokenness was through the blessing of grace ... and so he retreated to be alone and healed by God’s constant, ever-abundant, unfailing, steadfast gift of grace.

In that act of solitary retreat Jesus placed his trust in God’s power to heal brokenness with grace.

I know many of you who have experienced such grief are familiar with this kind of retreat. When sadness overwhelms you and to be around too many people is unbearable.

Even the Gospel writer Matthew doesn’t elaborate on what Jesus did in his deserted place leaving him to come to terms with John’s death in his own way.

Jesus, our spiritual director, friend, and Savior, ... teaches us to trust God to heal brokenness.

It is Jesus who shows us how to live as though we fully trust God’s goodness is far greater than any badness; to believe love has more power than hate; and know that despite the grief or sadness or suffering, God’s capacity to carry us through sustains us and heals us.

Grace is the heart of Jesus’ Good News message of salvation ... and if grace was the heart, then hope is the very fiber of our being.

Linking God’s gift of grace with the empowering and healing message of hope is God’s foundational storyline. The entire Biblical narrative is rooted in hope ... and Jesus’ teachings and message of love and reconciliation is summed up in the theology of grace.

Living by hope means (as the Christian Century most recently reported) we look for ways our story connects with God’s story.

Today's scripture lesson is the famous, well known story of the miracle of transforming five loaves of bread and two fish into (not only enough) to feed 5000 people, but MORE than enough. Enough to have food left over.

To me, the story of Feeding of the 5000 is a story of grace. God's story of grace helps reinforce our ability to live with hope.

The story of 'Feeding the 5000' is about being broken and blessed and it foreshadows the Last Supper and ultimately how our story connects with God's story.

Those 5000 men, besides women and children, were the poor and outcast. They were from the class denied dignity. They were essentially denied ... God!

They smelled. They were unclean. They were peasants who could not afford the entrance fee into the Temple. They were a lost, forgotten and disposable people.

But not to Jesus.

In their brokenness Jesus evoked blessing.

In the same way Jesus blessed and broke the bread on that hillside, he would soon bless the body of Christ at the Upper Room at the Last Supper.

In those two acts of Eucharistic symbolism, the faithful begin to understand how powerful Jesus' message of saving grace meant to them ...

... and what it means to each one of us.

In blessing and breaking the bread Jesus symbolically connected the 5000 men, women and children in an act of grace. Jesus taught everyone that God's abundant gift of grace was in the extravagant gift of giving and sharing.

Not birthday gift giving or even Christmas gift giving ... but in the kind of giving that gives something away without expecting anything in return.

I had a family member years ago who was very generous at birthdays and Christmas ... but she never really gave away her gifts. She held on expecting updates on how the gift was used, or when it was worn, or what it was spent on.

Her gifts had strings attached. She never really released the gift but held on tight never allowing the gift to be shared with others.

Because, you see, ultimately sharing is how God's gift of grace multiplies. One receives then shares in one continuous act of blessing ... and we keep doing that until all are fed.

But that won't happen if one of the grace-givers hangs on to the gift.

Shared grace has the power to pull us into sacred spaces. Grace has the steadfast strength to transform lives. Maybe because grace is so free and so sacred and so peace-filled we *want* to respond to it. We *want* to share it.

That's what I think happened on that hillside late one afternoon when thousands of people gathered to listen to Jesus' words of amazing grace.

Those words of grace must have been like a symphony of liberation. No longer considered the scum of the earth; the poor, the lame, the blind, the deaf, the bound and brokenhearted all experienced beauty and peace in Jesus' words.

How could you not want to respond in kind and loving ways to such beauty and peace? What better way to do that than to share what you had with one another?

Stan Duncan poses this question in his book 'If You Lived Here You'd Be Home by Now':

“Which is actually the greater miracle: for Jesus to change those few loaves into an abundance of loaves, or for Jesus to change the hearts of the people there to teach them how to share?”

That’s the age-old question isn’t it? Did Jesus really physically multiply bread and fish (which I don’t doubt he was capable of doing!)... or did he inspire people to share?

What Jesus did do in this story was to frame our approach to how we understand grace.

Yes, this is a story of sharing grace ... but it is also about the church of Jesus Christ today. This story is one of the best examples of how God’s story connects with our story.

We sit here this morning on a hillside singing, praying, and listening to God’s Word.

Jesus shares God’s blessed and broken bread with people who profess to be his followers ... those who have heard the words of grace and want to respond.

How do we respond?

Here’s a thought:

What if everyone brought one thing ... one item ... for the Blessing Box every Sunday? It could be anything from a can of beans to a roll of toilet paper.

It just has to be something to share ... with someone else ... with no strings attached.

Last week someone from the neighborhood asked me about the Blessing Box at the National Night Out event. She wanted to know how it worked.

“Is it like the library box where you borrow a book and leave a book?”

I said, “Yes, except it’s more like grace. We bring items to the Blessing Box to share with others with no strings attached. Each is blessed ... both the giver and receiver.”

“Cool!” she said.

We can debate day in and day out about the Blessing Box ... but I believe the Blessing Box is our symbol of hope.

When we place an item in the Blessing Box we don’t know how it will be used. We just offer it freely and live by hope that God’s grace will ultimately prevail.

Honestly, what better way to inspire hope than to be involved in an abundant act of sharing grace?

May it be so!

Amen

‘Come! Let us Share the Lord’ in the hymn found in the black hymnal #2269.