

2 August 2020

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 55:1-3; Romans 8:35,37-9; Matthew 14:13-31

Very lovely, simple and impactful readings today. All are welcome. Come, let all who are thirsty come to drink, says Isaiah. Let us be a place where people will find the refreshing mercy and love of God in Christ Jesus. The second reading skips over my favorite line perhaps in the whole Bible but certainly in Paul's letter to the Romans: If God is for us, who can be against us? But we did here other powerful words following that verse....Paul's certain faith that nothing, not even death, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. And then the beautiful Gospel story of Jesus feeding the multitudes. Some refer to it more as the "Multiplication of the Loaves," but I think calling it the "Feeding of the Multitudes" puts the emphasis on the right spot: less a magic trick and more an act of compassion.

You might have noticed that the Gospel reading today began with "After Jesus heard of the death of John the Baptist...." Indeed, the previous twelve verses in Matthew's Gospel account tell the story of the Baptist's martyrdom. And I wonder if there isn't quite a strong connection between the two stories. That it is no coincidence that Jesus would take in this awful news of the killing of his friend and prophet, his Forerunner, and respond in a very opposite way.

In other words, whereas the Baptist was killed in a palace surrounded by the drama of immorality, power-positioning, face-saving, and ego battles that led to great violence, Jesus, rather than going to the palaces and fighting that system head on, simply proposes an alternate vision. Seeing the destruction that results from lust and greed, he goes not to a palace but to an open field where not just the rich and famous and powerful but ALL who want to come, come—all who know their thirst, their need for what Jesus holds out to them. To quote Paul Simon, "When pain is all around, like a bridge over troubled water, I will lay me down." Jesus is the opposite of the palace drama. He seeks only to serve. He looks out at the crowd, intuits the brokenness and pain in those around him and wants to help them. He sees they are hungry and he wants to feed them.

This weekend we have two baptisms at our 9:00 mass. We hold out to these families an alternate vision to self-centeredness, jockeying for power and position—we hold out the way of love. "It will be your duty," we tell the parents, "to teach your child keep the commandments as Jesus taught them: to love God and love their neighbor." They say they clearly understand what they are doing. **But do they? Do any of us see what an alternate vision of life Jesus lived and holds out to us** than we commonly see displayed all around us?

Because Jesus' ministry and vision all seems to be based on his compassion and because in these COVID days that are so stressful and so in need of compassion. Because our world seems to be filling up more with hate than love...I just want to close with this song that Lucinda Williams composed based on a poem her father wrote:

Have compassion for everyone you meet
Even if they don't want it
What seems conceit is always a sign
Always a sign
Always a sign

For those you encounter
Have compassion c
Even if they don't want it
What seems bad manners is always a sign
Always a sign
Always a sign

Always a sign of things no ears have heard
Always a sign of things no eyes have seen
You do not know
What wars are going on
Down there where the spirit meets the bone
Down there where the spirit meets the bone
Down where the spirit meets the bone

For everyone you listen to
Have compassion
Even if they don't want it
What seems cynicism is always a sign
Always a sign
Always a sign

Always a sign of things no ears have heard
Always a sign of things no eyes have seen
You do not know
What wars are going on
Down there where the spirit meets the bone
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