

Shared With Each Other; Blessed by God

Listening to the bible readings each week, have you ever noticed that Jesus does not have any meetings?

There are no committee meetings, no board meetings, no scheduled groups, no councils, no conferences, or assemblies or summits or conclaves.

On the other hand, did you notice how many times Jesus is at a banquet or picnic or chatting by the water hole or having conversation over good wine?

His enemies labelled him a glutton and drunkard. They complain that he did not fast at the right times and that he ate with questionable people including tax collectors and sinners.

Thinking back over the parables that Jesus loves to tell, did you notice that he often speaks about wheat or fruit trees or banquets or vineyards.

When you look at most of our stain-glassed windows, here and elsewhere, they depict Jesus as a slim young man; I wonder if he might have been a little chunkier if he had not spent so much time travelling by foot around Galilee and back and forth to Jerusalem.

Many of the important events in Jesus' ministry involved food – his first miracle changing water into wine at a wedding banquet, the last supper with the disciples, and eating freshly caught fish on the beach after his resurrection.

If you look up spiritual practices they commonly include meditation, prayer and mindful presences. Eating is rarely listed as a spiritual practice, but perhaps it should be. Some of the best stuff in ministry happens over meals. People share shockingly celebratory and devastatingly painful news. Creative ideas are hatched. Relationships are formed and enriched. Substantial commitments are made.

Jesus knows this well. Out in a deserted place, at the end of the day, the disciples want to send the crowd away to get something to eat. He says to the disciples, “You give them something to eat” (v16). Unfortunately for the disciples, Jesus is referring to a crowd of thousands. The pragmatic disciples recognize that they have been asked to do the impossible, to feed thousands of people with next to nothing – five loaves and two fish.

This is something we can understand; there are many in our community who are hungry. The most visible are those who knock on our door because they are literally hungry for their next meal. There are many who are also hungry for hope in a slow economy, who are hungry for purpose and meaning in a world that feels so divided. In our overly connected yet also sadly disconnected world many are hungering for a deeper connection with God and with each other.

The disciples are right to notice the limitations. We are not equipped to do what we have been charged to do. We do not have enough.

However, a closer reading of Jesus' words here is helpful: "you give them something to eat." "you give them something to eat." The church is not asked to fulfil every need, is not asked to figure out how a few loaves and fishes are going to feed everyone. Jesus tells the disciples to bring what they have to him and share it. The miracle of the meal with baskets full of leftovers is not the church's miracle; it is God's.

The task of disciples today is not necessarily to pretend that we really do have some amazing food to serve a hurting world, but to share what we have been given, trusting that it is enough. Sharing it freely, wildly, irrationally with others, expecting that God can take our limited, feeble resources and make of them a feast to serve thousands.

Perhaps this is where we often get stuck, especially in these anxious times. We can be fearful or timid to share our gifts which seem too weak, too inadequate to be of any value when facing such enormous needs.

This is why we need to eat together more often, why we should examine our schedules and replace our committee meetings with more dinners. It is hard to imagine Jesus ever attending a committee meeting. He preferred banquets and picnics, chats by the watering hole, and conversation over good wine—perhaps it is because sharing food sets the stage for all kinds of other, deeper sharing that most people yearn for.

Thanks be to God for the shared meal. May it be blessed by God. Amen.

Readings: Matthew 14: 13-21