

PRAISE INTERNATIONAL
WHEN COMPASSION MEETS EMPTY
MATTHEW 14:13-21

Good Morning

Prayer Needs - August 20 Ordination – school starts this week.

April 21, 1986 30 million people watched a live broadcast from the Old Lexington Hotel in Chicago - it was hosted by a man who had lost his job for defending a female co-worker a couple years earlier so this was going to be Giraldo Rivera - a sort of opportunity for him to find a national platform again as a journalist. In the basement of the old Lexington Hotel on Michigan avenue was a walled off room that on investigation had been sealed off and many believed it was a secret vault for the notorious Chicago gangster Al Capone. The special was billed as the ‘opening of Al Capone’s vault’. Of course it was given a load of media attention running up to the event - what if anything would they find, cars, booze, guns, so not only did they have an emergency team on hand when they blew the vault - they had the Chicago police forensic team in case they found bodies. The first hour of the special was a build up and then they blew the vault open...to find...nothing - but a couple empty bottles...

You can go on the internet and find loads of articles with a title that read something like ‘ that time that Giraldo found an empty vault’. I can only imagine what it must have felt like for Giraldo in front of a live camera knowing he had another hour to talk about an empty room. Can you imagine the internal traffic in his head knowing that he had hoped for this to be the comeback of his career and he is left with headline ‘nothing here’.

But isn’t that how we often find ourselves in life - a deep awareness of a need for more but turning to look at what we actually have is nothing? That is exactly what Jesus disciples said in our text Matthew 14:15-17 *Now when it was evening, the disciples came to Him and said, “This place is secluded and the hour is already past to eat; send the crowds away, so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” 16 But Jesus said to them, “They do not need to go; you give them something to eat!” 17 They *said to Him, “We have nothing here except five loaves and two fish.”*

This all has a familiar ring to it - when crisis and the unimaginable come knocking at your door - my 4th son to be diagnosed with inflammatory bowel disease. It was gutting because here are my boys dealing with what had almost taken my life. I wanted to do or say something to make it better but it sure felt like 5 loaves and 2 fish compared to crohn’s, ulcerated colitis, esophagitis or primary sclerosing cholangitis. **It felt like I had nothing.** Truth is we have all had countless moments personally and even corporately - on a zoom call with my siblings as my sister shared how her best friend had just coded because the chemo therapy is killing her heart. My words feel so weak to the sheer weight of grief and loss in that moment.

In the five loaves and two fish moments when we feel overwhelmed, powerless, hopeless. When we feel like more is being asked of us than we can handle. We don’t know what to do or say.

Often it feels sad exhausting and lonely.

- It’s getting dark and, just like the disciples, we want to “send the crowds away” to fend for themselves because ‘we have nothing...but five loaves and two fish’.

It’s often not just that I don’t think I have enough but I begin to believe that I am not enough - **empty...**

What do we do when we have nothing? This is how we often interpret life from the position of lack.

And the secret is simply this Christ in you!
Yes, Christ in you bringing with Him the hope of all the glorious things to come.
Col 1:27b JB Phillips

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- Even how religion has taught us to relate to God is from a position of lack.
- We are the ones with need that cannot possibly be met and God came to fill.
- So it is not too hard to see how many have interpreted their life in God as a transaction - if we do our part God will do His...so our minds and ears become filled with 'if and when' messages.
When you do God will be pleased and come closer.

Two things about this basic gospel of lack;

- Oddly it is very similar to pagan views of God in Jesus day. The gods needed to be appeased so you could be blessed with abundance or spared impending doom.
- **In the Gospel God reveals something about God – something present in the God is not dependant on our empty vault – the measureless love of God.**
- **While we had nothing and did NOTHING in Compassion He came to remove distance and invite us to know Him. Our Nothing is nothing compared to His Compassion.**
- He who did not spare His own Son how will He not also with Him freely give us all things! Its lavish abundant and based in His love! Oh my goodness! And that beloved is the Love of God revealed in Christ!
- **That beloved is the Gospel!**

Empty – is not a hindrance of what is present in the heart of God compassion that reveals the satisfaction of His love that is enough. Our empty has nothing on the measureless compassionate love of God and that is Good News.

1. Empty - Nothing

- Matthew records the feeding of the 5 thousand in chapter 14:13-21
- **Consider the gravity of these words – 'we have nothing here – but 5 loaves and 2 fish'**
 - **Jesus friends convinced of their 'empty' encounter what the Compassion of the Father can do with their 'nothing'.**

Now here is the context;

- Jesus cousin John the Baptist has just been killed.
- Jesus and his disciples are gutted!
- He is trying to just be present in the **grief of this moment**. He goes away to a secluded place...its a moment was likely not filled with a lot of words.
- For Jesus this is His kin - for Peter and Andrew they were his disciples - they knew intimately the passion and clarity that John held for Jehovah.
- **The injustice that had to be screaming in their mind and heart** - here this man who had lived such a profoundly simple life of calling men and women to the God of the scriptures is **be-headed as a result of the indulgence and lust of those in power.**

Can I just state something very obvious here?

- If Jesus passion was that the followers of the Father would 'stand up for their rights' it should have been here....
- His cousin was jailed and killed for telling the truth!

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Maybe the disciples are wondering in the silence of those moments of solitude....what will our future be like?

- But people press in....
- People who are not aware or who are so consumed with their own lack that they ignore the needs of Jesus and the disciples....

Remarkable isn't it?

- **The disciples** are filled with speechless grief and maybe even a little fear is it because they are feeling that familiar feeling....are we all alone?

2. Compassion.

Jesus is grieving but He sees and is moved with what is IN Him – Compassion!

- Let me point this out clearly NOT because He was not tired or grieved. But because He knew He was NOT ALONE in His fatigue and grief....the Father is with Him!
- **Jesus reveals that grief injustice even fatigue does not mean He is alone! Or said another way grief and disorientation does not change the compassionate heart of the Father.**

Then as the day continues....

- its one of those moments that all control is being lost by the minute....
- more than unexpected friends dropping in...the crowds are coming into Jesus and the disciples secluded space. But Jesus is healing the sick....but the day is wearing on.

And finally they speak up....Jesus darkness is setting in....we are vulnerable and have no means of meeting the obvious needs of the people to eat.

- I mean cool that you are healing but with have nothing and they have real belly needs.
- **The only thing that the disciples can see is what they lack.**

John records in John 6 Jesus ask the question *'where are we to go to buy food...'*

- Curiously the disciples **don't hear the question** but answer with the what is consuming their mind and heart - their lack. 'Two hundred marinade (half a year of wages) would not be enough to feed such a crowd...'

Matthew records Jesus saying they *'you feed them'*

- Suffice to say Jesus invitations....were dis-orienting if the disciples were looking at themselves!

Can I just point out a couple of things here

- First Jesus is actually very kind in the face of doubt and dis-orientation...He is inviting His friends to live from a different place.
- Finally He says **'Bring them (bread and fish) to Me'**.
- Jesus is living connected to His Father He is not living under the demand and pressure of others...but **settled in the abundance of His Father!**

How do I know this?

- Matthew records Jesus vs 19 He looked to heaven and blessed (the bread) and broke it...

Fascinating...we have actually built some bad practice around this....so let me point something out -

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- The word Bread is NOT in the original text – my point is that Jesus is NOT blessing the bread!
- Dt 8:10 would have been the practice of every Jew...
*When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall **bless the Lord your God** for the good land which He has given you.*
- Not to ‘bless the food’ but to Bless the Lord for His provision....massive difference!

Actually some common thought is that Jesus put a special blessing ON the food and it multiplied....

- The historic and biblically accurate picture is that Jesus is **NOT even looking at the food** but the Father and blessing the Lord of abundance...who can not help but be who He is!

What happens when you are convince of your own lack....what are you looking at?

- **God multiply what I can see....OR...God thank you for who you are....**

In Jewish tradition they never ‘bless the food’ (which by the way is another dualistic way we can see the world....the blessed and the unblessed)...

- They thank God for the blessing of food and bless the Lord.
Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, Who brings forth bread from the earth.

3. Satisfied

- They ate and were satisfied – is not just a description but a revealing of what happens when the Compassion of Heaven meets empty – it reveals the God of Eden.
- The God who came to restore man to enough – enough grace, mercy, forgiveness...that the Goodness of His house becomes visible.

So what does all this mean as we face our empty vaults...

- **The limits and darkness you see are not the final word!**
- **Curiously what some thought would be the end of Giraldo's career was actually the launch.**

1. **Nothing** – my empty is not the point – what I do with that empty makes all the difference.
2. Encountering **Compassion** is the point – encountering the eternal is the point.
 - We are most like a beast when we kill
 - We are most like men when we judge
 - We are most like God when we forgive.....
 - Ephesians 4:32
 - *Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven [a]you.*
3. **Compassion** reveals the hope of the gospel – our hearts satisfied in His love.

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Closing Prayer

God beyond all seeing and knowing,
we meet You in the night of change and crisis,
and wrestle with You in the darkness of doubt.
Your generosity floods the world with goodness
and You shower creation with abundance.
Awaken in us a hunger for food to satisfy both body and heart,
that in the miracle of being fed
we may be empowered to feed the hungry in Jesus' name. Amen

Communion

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