

Broken For You©**Matthew 14:13-21****August 3, 2014****Rev. Sharlyn Gates**

Where do you go for alone time? Do you have a special place for retreating when you are tired, overwhelmed, just needing to have silence and time alone with your thoughts, with your prayers, time for just you and God?

I've always sought those places. When I was growing up on the farm, I so longed for quiet time away from my 5 younger siblings, the squabbles they got into (Of course, I never had anything to do with those squabbles!)

I enjoyed writing silly poems and stories and loved to write in my diary and draw. There was a stream on the other side of our pond and a huge tree with roots that I sat on. There were vines that stretched across the stream. I would sit there for hours sometimes just enjoying that time by myself.

As an adult, I have always looked for places to go for personal, silent retreats. I am renewed and restored by those times.

Bible scholar and commentator, William Barkley, writes that Galilee must have been a very difficult place to be alone. The historian, Josephus tells us that in his time, there were 204 towns and villages, each of them with a population of at least 15,000 people. Galilee was 50 miles long from north to south and only 25 miles from east to west! That is small indeed, especially for that many people!

No wonder Jesus could not find a deserted place! There wasn't any to be found. But we can imagine how desperate he must have been to be alone, to reflect on what happened to John, his cousin, to grieve and to pray. And of course, he knew that he was in as much danger as John had been.

So, he got in a boat and headed for the other side of the lake, hoping to find solace there. But, the crowds of people could see where he was headed. And they were anxious to be touched by him, to be healed by Jesus as they had heard of others being healed. They were longing for his words, his teaching. And without regard to Jesus' needs they raced around the lake by foot and met Jesus on the other side.

We have a lot to learn from this lesson in Matthew. These are lessons about being a true disciple of Jesus.

First of all, Jesus, being human, could have easily gotten frustrated with the crowd. He could have said, "I just can't deal with all of you right now. I need my own space. Go away and come back when I've had time to rest."

But he didn't do that. Instead, Matthew says, Jesus had compassion on the people and he cured those who were sick. Jesus never made the people feel that their needs were not important. He never looked at his watch as if to say, "You're sure taking up a lot of my time."

Instead, he tirelessly put others first, and his own needs last. He had compassion and cared deeply for all those who were in need. He gave himself and his time to them.

I would like to think that I am the kind of servant disciple that Jesus was. But I know I fall short. I know I am not always patient and I do pay attention to time, sometimes. How about you? With family and work and all the things that crowd into our daily lives, it's hard to be like Jesus, isn't it?

Yet, while we may not be perfect at it, Jesus is the best model we have for how to sacrificially give ourselves to others, put others before our own needs and desires. It is the thing we should strive for.

But then, we read on to the miracle of the loaves and fishes ... a familiar story, yet what do we make of it?

It was getting late and the disciples came to ask Jesus to send the people away so they could get something to eat. They told him there is nothing around here, in this deserted place.

But Jesus surprised them by saying, "You give them something to eat."

"But Jesus," they said, "We only have five loaves of bread and two little fish among us, and there are twelve of us, not counting you! Surely you don't expect that to feed all these people!"

But Jesus took the loaves and the fish and said the prayer of grace that all Jewish families said before a meal: "Blessed art Thou, Yahweh our God, King of the universe who bringest forth bread from the earth." In this prayer, Jesus is proclaiming it is God's gift that he brings to all people. It is giving thanks, showing gratitude for God's generosity.

And Matthew tells us there was enough to feed about five thousand men, plus women and children. And there was even some left over ... twelve baskets full! Enough for 12 faithful disciples.

So, what do you think happened? I think there are several possibilities.

First, I do believe that all things are possible with God. God has the power and ability to do anything that God decides to do. I wouldn't question that for all the world! If God

could raise Jesus from the dead (which I believe He did), God can sure turn five loaves of bread and two measly fish into a feast for five thousand-plus hungry people. If God could feed the Israelites in the desert, God could bless this food and make it stretch. I have no problem believing in a miracle, because I believe God is all powerful.

Yet, another possibility is that this is a feeding like the sacrament we are about to partake in – the Supper Jesus gives to us at this Communion table. It is bread that is broken for us and while we don't take a huge chunk of it (although I really want to!) it is spiritual food that nurtures our souls, that feeds us in ways that no other food can.

This bread sustains us, strengthens us, is a sharing in Jesus in a way that even today, we know his abiding presence with us, and in us.

Perhaps this miracle of the loaves and fishes was a sacrament, in a way ... Jesus' blessing and giving thanks for the food that God was providing and extending it out to the people by the help of his disciples who were serving ... the Communion servers of that day.

If that is the case, then the people were filled with spiritual food and they were satisfied and strengthened and nurtured, happy to have that, instead of a feast of another kind.

That is a miracle too! We can experience that miracle every time we come to the table.

But there is another possibility, isn't there? What if the miracle was really in the form of transformation? It seems unlikely that five thousand men would come with their families and not one of those wives would pack any food to feed their children or husbands, or themselves.

And knowing how humans can be, it is likely that they did not want others to see their food, they did not want to share it, but instead, to hoard it ... just in case they were there for a very long time.

But what if, in the act of Jesus taking what the disciples had and blessing it, breaking the bread, cutting up the fish to pass to others, what if hearts were changed that day, compassion and generosity took the place of the selfishness in thinking only of Number One?

Could the miracle really be that people, in the loving, healing, sharing presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, were transformed into disciples themselves – who put others first, who were generous and sharing, caring and compassionate?

To me, that would be the greater miracle because, while it would be spectacular for God to feed all those people with such a small amount of food, it's a lot more difficult for people's hearts and minds to be changed, molded into Christ-like beings, don't you think?

The transformation of regular human selfish people into new creations who look like Jesus ... that's the spectacular power of God at work in Christ Jesus, his Son.

So, the question is, where are you? Do you hear these stories and think of them as amazing things that happened long ago but that can't possibly happen today?

Do you sit in silence during Communion and experience the miracle at work in you? Do you allow the Bread of Life to fill you, to nurture and strengthen you, to bring you closer to the One who feeds you this spiritual food?

But do you also put yourself in a place where your heart and soul are soft and pliable? Where you are ready to be molded into the disciple Jesus needs, ready to feed others?

These are all the miracles of Jesus; All these things from the power of God; All things possible through God who loves you and gives you his Son.

This is Jesus. Bread of Life; food for the hungry soul ... broken for you.

May we together, grow in our discipleship and be used by Him to feed and care for the many who are hungry and longing for Christ. Amen.

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