

Send Them Away

Shepherd's Grace Church

August 3, 2014

¹³Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. ¹⁵When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and [buy food](#) for themselves." ¹⁶Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." ¹⁷They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." ¹⁸And he said, "Bring them here to me." ¹⁹Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve [baskets](#) full. ²¹And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children. (Matt. 14: 13-21) (Also Read Isaiah 55: 1-13)

When I was about 15, just after I had returned from Philmont Scout Ranch and the Boy Scout National Jamboree in Farugut State Park, ID; our senior scouts went on a survival campout along the Santa Fe trail here in Kansas. A survival campout is different from the regular monthly campouts we went on as scouts. On a survival campout, all you take with you is a pocket knife, 4 feet of fishing line, one fishing hook, 3 matches and an empty canteen. You are allowed to fill the canteen when you find fresh water and you are allowed to use any of the other supplies you have with you to obtain food.

The campout is a three day hike along the historic trail and is intended to demonstrate some of the hardships encountered by the early settlers to our area. There are usually 6-8 scouts and one-two leaders on the hike which is a 14 mile walk along the trail. The purpose, in addition to recognizing the hardships of early settlers is to teach teamwork and build confidence in your ability to work together. Survival is not about one person against the elements, it is about gaining understanding that we all have different gifts and those gifts, when used together can create something when there was nothing and abundance when there is scarcity!

Our group left on a Friday night from a place called Hopkins Switch, just north and west of Eldorado. Everyone was in good spirits and confident that we could be successful. As we walked along, we found some berries we recognized as edible. We gathered them and put them in the pocket of one of our team's shirt. We walked a little farther and found some frogs along the edge of a stream. We were able to catch 5 or 6 and we put them in the pockets of several of our team. We were only a couple of hours into our adventure and already we had our evening meal! Even more confident, we pressed forward along the trail convinced that we could conquer any obstacle in our way!

A little further down the path we looked behind us and saw a cloud line starting to form in the west. The weather forecast was for just a chance of rain but we were not worried. We believed we could handle whatever happened to come our way. We continued our hike, knowing that the farther we got

on Friday, the less we would have to push ourselves on Saturday to arrive at our pick-up destination on Sunday!

A little farther down the trail we came to a stream that was full and running fast. The trail led us to the narrowest part of the stream and we knew we had the best chance to cross at that point. One of our most senior scouts spotted the best way across and stepped out into the stream to guide the rest of us. Carefully, we stepped across on rocks that were just a few inches below the surface of the water. First one and then a second of us was across. As the third stepped into the stream, supported by the person who was fourth in line, suddenly he lost his balance. He slipped and fell pulling his partner into the water with him and causing the senior scout to be soaked by the stream as well. The three were wet but there was no harm done...or so we thought!

One of the three was the one who was carrying the berries. They were squished into his uniform pocket and now inedible. All three were so wet their matches were now useless and that left us only the matches from 5 people to start two campfires. We looked back to the west and the rain that was only a suggestion a few hours ago now looked more and more imminent! As we scrambled out of the water and across the stream our confidence was turned to concern and our once positive attitude was slightly shaken!

Realizing that there was a threat from the weather, we decided we would hike just a while further and find a good spot to camp for the night. We walked another 30 minutes or so and found a nice clearing with some available timber on the ground that we could easily gather for firewood. Working quickly, we set two people about gathering firewood, two at lashing poles together with the wet trousers of the ones who had fallen in the stream and two to seeing if they could catch any fish from the nearby stream.

Before those assigned to gather wood together had a chance to return, the storm moved in quickly. Those of us left around our campsite worked together to quickly assemble the shelter. We formed a lean-to from the existing wood and used our shirts to cover the logs so at least some of the water from the impending rain would be kept off of us. No sooner had we accomplished building our lean-to than the rain cut loose!

It was hard to imagine that from such a confident group of young men just a few short hours earlier, these few calamities could cause such doubt. Suddenly, our abundance and enthusiasm seemed to be snatched from us and what was left was doubt and lack. We had lost our berries, could not start a fire for the evening, were soaking wet and miserable. When we had much we were light-hearted and jovial. When we were faced with the prospect of nothing to eat, we began to point fingers and push at others so we could somehow make ourselves look better. I believe this is exactly where the gospel and the lesson from Isaiah 55 meet us this morning.

Isaiah 55 invites us into an abundant situation. God has provided enough for everyone and extends an invitation for all to eat from God's abundance. In the moment we hear the words of the prophet, we are encouraged to imagine that there is and always will be enough for everyone. Sitting under the lean-to soaking wet and seemingly starving, it was difficult to imagine there was enough for anyone.

We live in a world camped under the lean-to. From our vantage point with rain and cold dripping on our heads we cover ourselves and try only to survive. We cannot imagine abundance. We can only imagine survival and that seems distant and doubtful! Most of our world exists today in this distance and doubt. Nearly 2/3 of the world's population will go to bed hungry tonight. As they fall asleep, they will be able to imagine no difference for tomorrow. Their prayer as they fall asleep will be for enough...for just enough to see them through so they can pray the same prayer the following evening. Many of them know they will not be able to sustain themselves for another day; they pray for the peace that comes from not having to struggle for survival, but they know their prayer is selfish and shortsighted. While they do not have to struggle any longer, they know their families will have to struggle, to suffer, to succumb ultimately to the same fate that has befallen them!

Together, those who will survive lie with those who will not and they know only the reality of their situation. Abundance is not in their vocabulary. Hope is not in their minds! Yet God promises abundance! How can we look at a world where lack is the reality of life and believe that there is plenty for all?

Jesus answers the question this morning! In our message from the Evangelist Matthew, Jesus has just received some very bad news. He learns that John the Baptist has been beheaded in what is nothing more than an needless death. John's message in the wilderness was not a message of luxury but it was a message of abundance. He ate locust and wild honey. I am thinking frog legs and berries would have seemed like a veritable feast to him. He would have known many nights with nothing but the world of the Lord to feast upon but he would have known that it was enough! He would have known that it was more than enough! Undoubtedly, he would have laughed at our survival scouts as we huddled under the lean-to soaked to the skin. He would have known many of those nights!

John's abundance was a simple abundance. His abundance was of knowledge that "The Lord will provide!" As he stepped into the waters at the Jordan River, he reminded the Pharisees that God could change even stones into "sons of Abraham!" John's understanding of abundance came from the last part of Isaiah's passage today..."My ways are not your ways says the Lord! As high as the heavens are above the earth, so are my ways above yours!" For John, God's promise of abundance was a promise of the final resolution of creation and not of the struggle that goes on in the day to day life of the world! John's message was one of repentance from the gluttony of the world and turning to the "Bread of Life" and the "Living Water" which were coming into the world.

John lost his life encouraging even the most vile offenders of God to repent and reconcile with God. When Jesus heard this news, he withdrew to a deserted place, alone, to pray! He was shaken by the reality of the world. He knew how cold and heartless it could be! He understood that there were some who would never hear the word but He hoped that many would come, many would pray the prayers he taught them in the "Sermon on the Mount" and recognize that abundance comes not in having full shelves but in having enough and knowing that God will provide for all their needs because they are precious in His sight and Honored and Adored and He Loves them. (Is. 43.4) Jesus' grief was not for John! It was for the ones who would never hear John! It was for those who wanted to have only for themselves and hold on even beyond their need!

Jesus withdrew to a deserted place perhaps because He understood that it was in a deserted place that God initially showed abundance to an alienated and abandoned people. It was in the wilderness that God gave manna from heaven to demonstrate God's great love. Perhaps he wanted to pray in a place similar to the place where God connected with people and shared with them the "Bread of Life!" When he withdrew, it was to grieve a broken and beaten world.

When the crowds learned the news they followed Him out of their towns and villages. I wonder what news the crowds learned. Did they learn that John had been killed? If so, were they in a rebellious state of mind? Were they wanting to overthrow the organized government and replace it with one ordained by...by what? By God? Were the crowds out there to make Jesus king? In Luke's story this was the suggestion. Matthew makes no mention. We can probably assume some came out to witness a change; a wanted change that would end the oppression of the world! They were hungry and thirsty for justice. What was it Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount? "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice for they shall be satisfied!" (Matt. 5.1-11) Perhaps some went out for justice for John. We should wonder what kind of justice they expected.

Others might have gone out because they heard Jesus was going out. Maybe that was the news they heard and they knew of his reputation for miracles and healing! Perhaps they went out because they heard his message in the Sermon on the Mount and went out because they were the meek, the poor in spirit, the ones who mourned. Knowing that Jesus was going out, perhaps they went to find mercy and life in a world that only seemed to offer death.

Whatever the reason, they went out. When Jesus arrived, they were waiting for Him. When he came off the boat the crowd was great; 5000 men and we can only assume as many women and children! Jesus, not knowing each individual reason, but knowing their sense of hurt and helplessness was moved to compassion for them! The place where he met them was not far from the place where he first preached to them. (I have included pictures at the end of the message) Many who were there for the preaching probably came out again, hoping for a word, an encouragement, a touch that would heal their hurting. Jesus did not disappoint!

He was moved with compassion for them and he healed their sick. In the midst of the storms of their lives, when they perceived the greatest need for change or experienced the hardest hurt, or found themselves in the greatest pain, he came among them and touched them with a word or an embrace or an action that reminded them that even though they were in a storm, they were in the storm together. He reminded them that they were huddled under the lean-to of life and they were not alone! He reminded them that among them there were the skills, the gifts, the talents to accomplish the abundance God promised when God encouraged them to "ask for their daily bread!" (Matt. 6) He pointed to those who were with Him and showed them evidence of their success.

Perhaps he told the crowds how He had sent them out among others empowering them with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps he told them of how these men had overcome their own weakness and doubt to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of God! Perhaps he shared with them stories of how they had cured the sick, made the lame to walk and even raised some from the dead! Maybe he made the

connection for them that these men were just like them! Maybe he invited them to know that they too could accomplish great things, encourage great change, overcome their own weakness not by their own ability but by the gifts given by God! (Phil. 4.10) Perhaps he emphasized to them that all of this would happen if they were willing to work together, if they were willing to be in relationship with one another, if they were willing to trust the power of God given through the Power of the Holy Spirit so that they might know God's promise of abundance! Perhaps he used their grief along with His own to encourage them to more! Perhaps in that moment their confidence was as great as ours was as we set out for our survival weekend!

Then, just then darkness came! As the sun was setting, the disciples, those who had heard his message, had experienced his gifts, had seen his healing power come to him and said, "Send them away!" The disciples, in an abundance of concern for the great crowds said, we do not have enough resource to feed them by ourselves. Send them Away! We have only five loaves and two fishes. Send them Away! We know we have cured the sick, healed the lame, and even raised people from the dead but the size of the crowd, the complications of preparing for so many...well, that is beyond us! Send them Away!

I wonder, if we are honest, if we do not see a little of ourselves in the words of the disciples this morning. If we take inventory of what we do in the name of Jesus we find some startling achievements. We feed the hungry! We visit the sick! We speak to those in prison and hurting! We clothe those who are cold! We invite those who are dead to God and themselves to hear a Word of healing and hope! Those who are alienated and abandoned are welcomed to our sanctuary! As we look at all we do, we minimize what God has done through us...through us together! We do not see our meager contribution as significant and in truth, our individual contribution is not significant. What we do by ourselves is not important to the overall coming of the Kingdom...but what we do together is immeasurable!

God invites us to hear that message today! When the disciples come to Jesus and say, "Send them Away!" they are failing to recognize the power they have in the presence of God! Fortunately, Jesus knows their power. He sees their shortcomings as individuals but recognizes that together they have all the gifts they need to accomplish the ministry before them. He invites them to take inventory of what they have. He invites them to assess the situation they are in and to share their skills together. The disciples, on their own, do not have much. Five loaves and two fishes are what they report as the food available to them. It seems like such a little but what they have forgotten is that "little is much when God is in it!"

Jesus reminds them. Without judgment of their faith or their failure to remember what they have done, Jesus says, "I see no reason to 'Send them Away!'" "You give them something to eat!" He offers no recriminations or accusations, he simply reminds them that the Kingdom of Heaven has come near. (Matt. 4.18) In the nearness of the Kingdom there is the fulfillment of possibility which is beyond their imagination. He commands them to bring Him their gifts. In this moment, the disciples hold nothing back. They bring everything they have and Jesus accepts it.

When we bring all we have, when we withhold nothing God graciously receives it and accepts it. In Genesis 4, Able makes this kind of offering. He gives from his whole heart and God is pleased with his

offering. His brother gives from what he has without thought for what he offers or to whom the offering is made. God wants the offerings from our heart, not from our wealth. He wants the best of what we have and he longs for all of that, given freely, given out of love, given with the whole of who we are! God will bless that offering and use it to the fullness of God's purpose! This morning, when we make our offering, I urge you to consider not only what you have to give, but how you give it! Do you offer freely and without hesitation? Do you offer out of love for God, a love that comes from your whole heart and mind and strength? That is the offering God asks of each of us and of all of us! When we make that offering together, God will multiply it beyond anything we can possibly imagine!

Now...now that the disciples have given everything, Jesus accepts their gifts. He takes the loaves and blesses them, probably using the Hebrew blessing that all in the crowd would recognize. "Blessed are you or Lord our God, creator of the universe! From you we have this bread to eat!" Then Jesus does what God does with our offering every week. He gives it back to the disciples. In giving back, He demonstrates his trust for us, trust that we not only love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, but love our neighbor as our selves. God trusts that we will share, that we will give freely from what we have recognizing that all we have comes back from God, blessed and broken and given in abundance, not from us as individuals but from all of us as the communion, the sharing of the very "Body of God!"

Jesus gives the offering back to the disciples and they share with the crowds which have been ordered by God to receive the offering! As we hear the story we are often astounded at the feeding of the many. This is an incredible gift from God but the real miracle in our story this morning is in the growth of the disciples. They learn! We learn that God intends us to recognize in our daily lives that we are blessed beyond measure, not with what we can use for our own purposes but with what we can give away. We are blessed with an abundance that we can share if we are willing to come together to share it! The lesson learned by the disciples is not a lesson in what God can do. God does not need to teach that lesson. The lesson the disciples learn is what God can do through them...through us if we are willing to give all we have! Salvation is never about individual reward! Salvation is about how we come together as a community of sinners willing to become communion, the "Body of Christ" for one another.

As our survival campers sat underneath the lean-to, rain soaked and hungry we bickered among one another. We pointed fingers and accused. We doubted each other and we failed to work together. Then the new person, the one who had just recently come among us spoke. He spotted berries growing just outside the shelter. We went over and we were amazed. There were even more berries than we had gathered before. There were plenty for all of us. Having eaten our fill, we gathered back under the lean-to in the rain.

The newcomer then asked me, "so what was it like at National Jamboree?" I shared a few stories and then some of us who had been to Philmont together started sharing stories of our adventures there. We talked about "Tooth of Time ridge" and about the night the bear stole food from our camp. We laughed and shared some more. Then we began to sing campfire stories and even though there was no fire, there was a warmth from being together, from working together. We were no longer 6 individuals but a team, a unit functioning together for the good of all!

National Jamboree and Philmont were two of the greatest scouting experiences I could ever have imagined but I forgot about how fortunate I was for awhile because I found myself in a difficult situation. Once I was reminded of how much I had, I found it easier to expect that I would continue to have even more. When I shared from my experiences at the encouragement of others, we all drew from the joy and the journey.

Today we all share from our individual experiences as we worship and as we recognize all we have been blessed with. As we recall the scripture for this morning we can appreciate how easy it would have been for Jesus to "Send them Away!" Instead, he served them by reminding the disciples of how much they had. I believe he reminds us this morning as well. When we are tempted to look at others and say, there is not enough for the immigrant, there is not enough for the poor, there is not enough for the ones who do not look like we do, perhaps we should remember Jesus' words to the disciples..."I see no reason to 'Send them Away!'"

Our love for God and neighbor should compel us to see no reason either! "Send them away!" NO! You are blessed! You have the gifts together! You have all you need...together! You give them something to eat! "Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God!" (Matt. 4) Share the word! Share the wealth! Amen!