

“Broken Bread”  
 August 6, 2017  
 Text: Matthew 14:13-21

Island Heights UMC, Island Heights, NJ  
 Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

*Now 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.*

*When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.*

*When 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."*

*Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."*

*They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish."*

*And he said, "Bring them here to me."*

*Then 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.*

*And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full.*

*And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.*

#### Got to Get Away

Jesus needs to retreat for a while. He needs to get away to a deserted place. A place to be alone. Just before this passage in Matthew's gospel word had reached Jesus about John the Baptist. The news about is not good. He spoke truth to power and was decapitated for it. There is trouble in the land. These are turbulent times. Rome is oppressing, Herod is corrupt. The death of John the Baptist is a sign everyone is playing for keeps, and the desire for a Messiah is stronger than ever. But Jesus needs some alone time. Give him some space. He gets in a boat on the Galilee and sails off by himself to a deserted place.

#### Compassion

But the crowds move after him. While he's in a boat re-locating to a place of solitude, the crowd is following him on foot along the shore. When Jesus comes ashore, they are waiting for him there.

And his compassionate heart awakens once again. It always does. There's something more important than his own time of rest and reflection, and it's these

wandering people in front of him who come with un-named sicknesses and unsatisfied hungers. Now that he sees them face to face, he cannot turn and walk away. And so he cures their sick.

And so their relationship begins. How could they ever leave him now? The disciples may be practically minded when they tell Jesus to let them go so they can move back toward the villages for some food at the end of the day, but a bond has already forming between Jesus and the people.

### Jesus's Desire

For the disciples, it's usually a practical matter, and their realistic steady mindedness takes over. There is no food; not really. Five loaves of bread and two fish and a crowd this size? Absurd! We need to get this crowd out of here. Hungry mobs can become angry mobs. *You can tell them to all go away, Jesus. They will do what you say.*

*"They need not go away,"* Jesus says, *"you give them something to eat."* It's a lesson for the disciples regarding mission. It's a reminder of their abilities to do what needs to be done. It's an assurance about resources. You have what is needed, it's all within your reach. Actually, there's more than enough!

*"Bring the bread and fish to me,"* Jesus says.

Yes, there is a miracle about take place. Thousands of people are going to be fed with what begins as merely fives loaves of bread and two fish. There's even going be plenty left-overs. This is a recorded event in the gospels. and it's significance is apparent as it is one of those rare instances when the same story is found in all four gospels.

But something deeper is going on here; something basic and at the heart of who Jesus is and continues to be. He wants to share a meal with these people.

*I just want to eat with all of you, to commune with you, to be one with you over a meal!* Do you see it, disciples? It's like that day when he hollers,

*"Zacchaeus! Come down out of that tree. I want to have dinner with you at your house tonight!"* Zacchaeus!—a tax collector. But Jesus makes a practice of eating with tax collectors and sinners.

Food matters. Jesus grills fish for breakfast at the shore for his disciples after his resurrection.

But of course, before that, there's the final meal he shares with his disciples before he's arrested, tortured and crucified. It's the basis of the Lord's supper. Our Holy Communion. And it's all centered on there being something very special and intimate about sharing food with others.

### Saying Grace

We are in an interesting setting. It's a deserted place, a desolate and lonely place. But somewhere within it is some grass where Jesus directs this crowd to sit down. This is the shepherd once again leading the flock to a good place, a green place, a place where there are signs of life. We are familiar with this setting. It's Psalm 23: *"He leads me into green pastures...He prepares a table for me, he anoints my head with oil;*

*my cup runneth over.*” It’s here that Jesus says grace:

*Jesus takes the five loaves and the two fish, he looks up to heaven, and blesses and breaks the loaves, and gives them to the disciples, and the disciples give them to the crowds.*

We know that language, and we know those gestures. We are at the Lord’s table. And Jesus is breaking the bread of life. He is serving the sustenance of life. Jesus breaks the bread. And Jesus *is* the broken bread.

### Broken Bread for Hungry, Broken People

Five thousand people that day getting what they need—broken bread for hungry, broken people. We are easily numbered in that crowd. Who among us has not been broken in some way and in need of healing? Are we not in that hungry crowd that follows Jesus as he sails along in that boat waiting for him to come ashore. Would not want to get as close as we could to this Jesus who heals and nourishes?

There’s hunger in our souls. Hunger for something better, something real; a life worth living, a hope for tomorrow, We’re hungry for love, hungry for meaning and purpose. And hungry for the assurance that everything is going to be alright.

The only thing which satisfies these hungers is the compassionate heart of God which is breaking the bread of life for us. We come together over this meal, and Jesus is present. The good news is that Jesus just wants to share a meal with us—a life-changing meal. And his desire to commune, to be one with us is so strong that Jesus becomes the broken bread. To this day the crowds continue to be fed; compassion remains, the sick are still cured, the imprisoned ones are still being set free, the ones who grieve are being comforted, and the hungry are being fed.

One will be enough for all. All will be filled and satisfied. Our faith grows into this reality. There is enough to go around. There are unlimited resources from the Creator. If stewarded and handled carefully there will always be enough. One person, Jesus the Christ, in all and through all, will be enough for an entire human race. There are even leftovers!

### Our Mission Continues

And for us, the mission continues. So, ensure that everyone gets enough. *You feed them*, Jesus says. We all have the responsibility to care for each other. A mark of a Jesus follower is that they are attuned to other’s needs. Compassion overrides self-interest and self-preservation.

Exercise radical hospitality. All around are people who are broken in some way, or who are hungry—hungry for food, hungry for connection, hungry for some good news. *They need not go away.* Ministering to them will be ministering to Jesus.

Remember the compassionate heart of Jesus: *I just want to eat with all of you, to commune with you, to be one with you over a meal! I will share myself with all of you. I am broken bread.* This bread has now been multiplied uncountable times. In this meal we are made one with each other. In this miracle meal we all become broken bread. Amen.