

Matthew 14:13-21

In the name of God...AMEN.

I'm so moved these days by the witnesses of activists in the BLM movement. I'm following Monica Cannon-Grant, whom I read about in the Boston Globe on June 6th - maybe you know her. She's the one who organized the massive non-violent protest in Franklin Park, Boston, on June 2nd after George Floyd's murder on Memorial Day. Well, it turns out that she has a website and facebook page, Violence in Boston, and she's been keeping track of gun violence and the shooting of black and brown people in Boston for several years now - every time there is a shooting, it gets put up online, for all the world to see and be shocked by and lament and work to bring an end to the violence. And now with the COVID pandemic, as so many people have been thrown out of work, or caught the virus from being on the front lines, or died and left a family in need, she has mobilized her family, community members, the city, the mayor, anyone she can wrangle, and now she feeds over 1700 people a day. A DAY. She is modest and no-nonsense, and she and her community are the most awesome Saints in Action.

So I thought of her as I was reading this morning's Gospel lesson. The story of Jesus' miracle in feeding 5000 people from a few loaves and fishes is of course one of THE most important messages, a central metaphor of our Christian faith. It is the only miracle of Jesus recorded by all 4 Gospel writers, so you know how important it was to those earliest Christians. It comes out of our deepest scriptural traditions, harkening back to the Old Testament stories of how God fed the people of Israel in miraculous ways: first with manna in the wilderness after Moses had led them out of Egypt; then the accounts of the prophets Elisha and Elijah feeding hundreds with 20 loaves and a few ears of corn, and being fed during desperate times. In all cases the people ate and marveled and lived to tell the story of how God saved them and sustained them.

And so on that day that Jesus met the crowd by the shores of the lake, they were all hungry and thirsty and tired, AND they knew the sacred stories as well: stories of very little becoming an abundance through God's intervention; stories of hopeless situations when people despaired, but God provided; stories of our problems, our impossibilities, that are transformed by God's power and possibilities.

That day Jesus had just been preaching in parables on this very topic of abundance from something small: that tiny mustard seed turning into a tree, that little bit of yeast in bread dough that makes the whole thing rise, that single pearl worth a fortune, that little fishing net that overflows with a boatload of fish. And the message? We are that pearl of great price, so precious to God; if we have faith in God, even if it is as tiny as a mustard seed, or a few grains of yeast, then all of God's abundant love and guidance and grace and power is available to us - to move mountains, to do good in the world and for the world, to inherit the kingdom of God.

And so we come to Jesus here, on the lake shore in a deserted place, where the rubber meets the road, so to speak. What do those parables mean as he is confronted with the hopelessness, the yearning, the pain

and suffering of the people, like sheep without a shepherd? Well, he has compassion on them, healing them and bringing them back to God, their true shepherd. What do his parables mean when his disciples confront him with their fears and worries about scarcity and deprivation? They say: "There is not enough, we can't do this." And he has compassion on THEM, and on that tired and hungry crowd of 5000 - which, you know, with women and children was probably closer to 10 or 15,000, because back then only the men were counted. He says, "Bring the little you do have to me." And when it had been blessed, "YOU go and distribute this; give it back to the people; go and feed the hungry; you will have more than enough." And you know the rest, how there was more than enough for thousands of people.

This was what Jesus called his people to do then, and 2000 years later, he is still calling us. This is what we are called to do now: bring what little, or what great amount we may have, to God; then, hold it together in COMMUNION with God and with one another; and then see how God blesses and multiplies what we offer, filling us physically, emotionally and spiritually; next, remember Jesus and what he said we should be about, as we share with one another; and finally turn and offer that abundance to the tired and hungry world, the Covid-sick world assaulted by disease and death, by injustice and corruption, by bigotry and fear. Bring, bless, be filled, turn and offer. This is what Jesus calls us to do. We may not have the strength or stamina of Monica Cannon-Grant, but we can all do something.

In better times we could move right from this moment to our prayers and then on to our most important symbol of feeding and nurturing, the bread and wine, the Body and Blood of our Lord. Right now we need to remember how it felt and imagine how it will feel again when God blesses us and fills us and nurtures us in that particular way.

In the meantime, hold onto the faith working in you. Bring your life to God, whatever wholeness or fragments and broken pieces you may have, trusting that God will make something bountiful out of it. Let God transform your heart and your soul and your life, with the reassurance that with God there is always more where that came from, there is always more than enough. With faith in God we tap into a vast, infinite reservoir of love and compassion and rich spiritual resources. We get our fill spiritually, then we are called to take that resulting blessed abundance, in whatever form it comes to us, and distribute it over the face of the earth. Jesus says to us: "Here, here is the abundance of which I have been speaking. You go and do my work and distribute what you have received, and all will be abundantly satisfied." May it be so, through the abundant grace and power of God. **AMEN.**