

~~14:13-21~~ 14:13-21

11th Sunday after Pentecost

August 23, 1987

Jesus just wanted to be alone. He withdrew from there to a lonely place apart. On that day Jesus was not interested in teaching and reaching and healing. It was not his intention to bless children, or to teach his disciples to pray. For terrible news had come to him. John the Baptist was dead. John, who had been there at the beginning of Jesus ministry, who had pointed to Jesus and announced, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. John who had ~~been~~ stood there in that water with Jesus, baptising him, witnessing God's own spirit descending upon Jesus, John was dead.

~~John had died of a heart attack or been struck down by some local epidemic. I don't know that Jesus would have sought a quiet place, an alone place.~~
John had been beheaded because a young girl's dance pleased a king. He said Ask anything. She said, "John's head on a platter. When Jesus was told all of this he withdrew to a lonely place apart.

Sometimes we talk and act as if the Christian is always to be available, always helping and smiles and giving. Always praise the Lord. But how often ~~Jesus~~ ^{how many times} withdrew, went off alone to pray. A time of quiet, a time of peace, if Jesus needed this time, how much more do we. When the TV is not blaring, no book or newspaper in our hands, nor knitting nor fishing rod. a time to stop and reflect and pray. I find that when I most need that time, I most fear it, so full of going and doing and talking that the silence seems almost death. ~~Then~~ Our Lord did not fear the silence, we need not fear it either.

But as is so often the case in life, when we most need that lonely place, the demands come even there to pull us back. The crowds heard where Jesus was heading and rushed out to drain more from him. He had compassion upon them and healed their sick. When evening came, the disciples came to him and said, This is a lonely place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." A practical suggestion. Jesus said, "they need not go away, you give them something to eat." We have only five loaves here and two fish. They were practical, realistic. They

saw the need, the resources at hand, they knew the people could not be fed with these.

Jesus said, "Bring them here to me." He took the loaves and the fish, looked up to heaven, blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples, and they gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied, why even the leftovers were abundant. twelve baskets full.

Now I try to be a practical man. What can we do to make a difference for the hungry of the world, or to bring peace in the middle east, or to ~~one~~^{but} one man dying of ~~it~~^{it}? The answer that forms on my lips is nothing. But within me there is that dreamer, or is he simply the man of faith. What if we believed in God and listened to God, how many loaves do we have, how many fish? How many might be healed and satisfied and brought to peace if we could only let faith take root in our hearts and grow. Five thousand that day were fed, plus all the women and children. What might God do in us and through us if we would but hearken diligently to him, ~~incline~~^{turn} our ears away from all the noise and babble music which fills them every waking hour and incline them to God. What if we would respond to the invitation we heard from Isaiah, the invitation to come to God, hear him that our souls might live. What would faith the size of a grain of mustard seed do in my life? Would it free me from all that drives me, the greed, the anxiety, the chasing after more and more security? Would just that much faith ~~break~~ soften those hard spots in my heart, make me gentle, forgiving? How God might feed people then! What if it happened to all of us that we believed ^{enough} to let go of all the anger, and the fear? ^{or need to get it under-} What could God do if he had all the gifts and blessings he has provided us? What could we do if for just one day all that we have and are were at his command?

But I am practical. So when there are five thousand people and I've got my five loaves and two fish, I hang on tight, buy some loaves even, and pray to God that he should find something for the rest of them. Because I remember John the Baptist.

So God says today, thousands of years after first said them, "

Ho everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, ~~an~~ buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Hearken diligently to me and eat what is good and delight yourselves in fatness, Incline your ear ~~to~~ and come to me; hear that your soul may live.

listen to God, he will feed you with bread that satisfies even as Christ satisfied the five thousand.

One thing I fear doing as a pastor. I am always afraid ~~to~~ of painting too rosy a ~~pa~~ picture. Those who stand in pulpits in other places say, Pray, believe, you'll have healing and bread and ~~heal~~ safety. Five thousand were fed that day, but they all got hungry again. When Jesus finally did get his time alone later that night surely he saw his own head soon to be served up on the platter of the cross. Five thousand are fed and its like heaven has come, the kingdom has come. But the night would not be over before a storm tossed a little boat around on the sea.

~~It is as if~~ good and evil are butting heads repeatedly in this world. The good man John killed for nothing, the next moment healing and food the way God wants healing and food for his children. Blessings and curses, love and hate, forgiveness and revenge ~~all~~ wrapped up and rolled together in the package that is our life. God says, believe, trust in me, I will have the last word in Jesus Christ. When every dark cloud has flashed and sounded and the winds have beaten and the hail and the rain have pelted, when the darkness has blotted out every star, then I ~~stik~~ will be the light of the new day. Christ has defeated evil and sin and death and the devil, every enemy, ~~you~~ ^{as its not everywhere apparent} ~~will see it.~~ ^{but its true.} wait patiently, believe in him, and I will break the power of evil over your heart even now.

When one you love, a mother or father, has lost the ability to remember, has become a child in the mind, then God's new day just can't come too soon. Or when a life of a son or a daughter, so sweet and precious turns sour with

drinking and drugs and disobedience how we ache for heaven to touch earth.

But we are promised that we will never come to a place so lonely that God will not be there. Paul says it so boldly, "For I am sure that neither death nor life nor things angels nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers nor heighth nor depth not anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Until the kingdom comes, even as God satisfies five thousand here, millions there, for some five loaves don't go around, and some heads of G's servants end up on platters. What tomorrow will bring to you or I, we do not know. But know that God will be in that tomorrow with you, getting you ready for that final tomorrow when you will be with him forever he wants you to have.