

MATTHEW 14: 13-21: COME! BUY FOOD -- FOR FREE!!

We all have them—days when life is simply too much. Days when one more thing will either put us over the top or sink us. Even Jesus knew what that felt like. In Matthew's story of the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus is grieving the death of John the Baptizer. He needs time to himself, both to mourn and to rest. But the crowds find him, bringing all their needs with them, needs for healing, inside and out.

Seeing them, Jesus has compassion. Not a soft, polite, I'll pray for you kind of compassion, but a gut-wrenching, heart-moving compassion that calls him to action. He sets aside his own exhaustion to serve them. At the end of this long day, the disciples realize that if the people don't leave soon they will have nothing to eat for their dinners. They act compassionately, asking Jesus to send the people off to find food for themselves before it's too late. Jesus, the supreme example of compassionate behavior, startles the disciples by saying, "They don't need to go away. You give them something to eat." "With what?" the disciples wonder. And Jesus takes the five loaves and two fish, the "just enough" food the disciples had brought for themselves, and when the crowd has been not just fed, but filled, there is not only enough—there is more than enough. Twelve basketfuls of "enough."

In this story we see the difference between our human compassion and God's compassion. God does not merely acknowledge our hunger, our grief, our anxiety, or our exhaustion. God takes action. God feeds us. God fills us. God invites us, as Isaiah says, to come without money and without price—to receive for free what we cannot earn and do not have to deserve.

So maybe this story is not meant to be about learning to be like Jesus. Maybe it is meant to remind us of how much Jesus loves us. We are invited and encouraged to come to Jesus with nothing left to give but our pain, weariness, and need. And when we do, Christ does not send us away. He tells us to sit down, rest, and be fed.

Come to the table. Bring your burdens. Be filled with the love and comfort of God. Amen.
Thanks be to God.