

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 4, 2016

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Decorah, Iowa

Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

Click here to read the scripture passage for today: [Mark 6:30-44](#)

From Fear Into Abundance

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Jesus told the disciples to “come away to a deserted place and rest awhile” because they’d been “coming and going and had no leisure even to eat.” Coming and going with no leisure to rest or, sometimes, even too eat is an all too familiar experience for many of us this week. The Jacobsens, Ruizes and all sorts of volunteers have been cleaning out flooded homes. Many others are facing their own or loved ones’ health challenges. A number of us are grieving the deaths of loved ones. Students, teachers and staff are starting a new academic year. And then there’s just the regular coming and going we all do every day as we keep up with the tasks and duties that make up the daily grind.

Jesus’ invitation to “come away to a deserted place” sounds pretty good. And I imagine it sounded pretty good to the disciples, too. They’d been doing everything Jesus asked of them and they were exhausted. Finally, a chance to just get away from it all and let down. Finally, Jesus was going to tend to them. But then, huge crowds of people with major needs start showing up; Jesus seems to forget all about helping the maxed-out disciples get a little R and R. Jesus has compassion on the crowd and starts to teach and care for them. The disciples get a little panicked - all these people in this deserted place. How will they manage it all? They’re already exhausted and now more is asked of them. And all these people will need to eat but there is nowhere to buy food!

The disciples come up to Jesus all worked up and insist: “this is a deserted place and the hour is very late, send them away that they may go to the surrounding country and villages and buy something to eat.” The get-away spot that they craved has now become a scary place with limited resources. Jesus’ compassion, which had seemed like such a good thing, now contributes to their resentment of the crowd. They are overwhelmed and overcome. To make matters worse, Jesus has a radically different point of view about the whole situation. While the disciples see the people in the crowd only as more demands and more pressure, Jesus sees them with the eyes of compassion. He won’t send them away to go get food and to top it all off, he tells the disciples, “you give them something to eat.” The disciples don’t respond well. They whine, “you want us to go and spend a huge amount of money to buy food for all these people?” They go into full-fledged panic mode, a scary place that we often know all too well, especially in times of disaster, illness and grief.

Jesus responds to the disciples’ panic by telling them to go and find out how many loaves they have. He directs their focus away from all the demands and needs, away from their fear of scarcity, and towards the resources they have - five loaves and two fish. Then Jesus slows things down. First, he has the disciples get everyone to sit down in the green grass in smaller groups. Then he says grace, breaks bread, and gives it to his disciples to share. He empowers them to be of service, to see that they can do something - they don’t need to stay stuck, feeling overburdened and overwhelmed. Surprisingly, wondrously, all eat and have their fill, including by the way, the hungry disciples. There is more than enough of the meal, more than enough of Jesus’ compassion, to meet the needs of the disciples and the crowd.

In fact, what looked for awhile like a frightening, deserted place of scarcity becomes the scene of a great picnic, with people sitting together in the green grass, talking, laughing, and sharing what they have. Bodies

and spirits are fed. The disciples have the chance to rest and be nourished. They get what they needed in the first place. Jesus slows everything down and opens up a new space, a new way of being. He invites the disciples to move out of panic and fear and into a place of trust, gratitude and generosity.

We often wonder if we have the resources - the energy, the empathy, the focus - to meet the challenges ahead. Will we get compassion fatigue with the many needs of our loved ones, community and world? And who will care for us and tend our needs? Into this tight, scary place, Jesus comes and opens up space for us to live in trust and hope. As he did for the disciples, he does for us. He invites us into simple practices that have a profound effect. Slow down, breathe. Focus on what you have rather than all the demands and all that seems lacking. Say grace. Share. Trust. God is at work in and for you for the sake of the world. Sit down in the green grass (well, as long as it isn't too close to the river!). Pray. Laugh. Practice gratitude and generosity. These and other practices of faith have sustained people throughout time, throughout the world. They have sustained this congregation for almost 60 years and they will sustain us now as well.

Here is a community that gathers to share a meal, to sit down together to laugh and to cry. Here we share in practices of faith that open us to a life of trust and generosity. We slow down, breathe, pray and focus; we hear God's promises of abundance; we share in the meal of God's love. Like the disciples at the great picnic, you will find that your needs are met in this community in unexpected ways. The witness of others here might cause you to reconsider your resources and the ways you use them. A person you might be tempted to dismiss as needy and annoying might help you to slow down and receive nourishment. As you witness Jesus' compassion being shown to those outside your own circles, you may find space for grace opening up inside you. As you are empowered to use what you have to serve others, the needs and demands of the world may begin to feel less overwhelming and burdensome.

Jesus invites you, as he invited the disciples, to come away to another place to rest and be fed. He invites you out of the fearful places and into a new and different space where you will be nourished in surprising, wondrous ways. We all are welcome in this space and in it we will find that we have all that we need to trust, to give, to live.

So let's take a few moments to breathe, rest and pray ...