



Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 10, 2017

In the Word of God, We have the Word of Life

Matthew 15:32-39

As we did last week, with the theme "It is time, it is God's Time," we take time for a moment in time, a time in silence for prayer, for focus, with the confidence that we about worship in the power of the Holy Spirit...

Have you been keeping up with the breaking news? The power of nature as we trace the ongoing threat of hurricanes. It is a power that nearly takes your breath away; we have heard the narrative by those who create a path of response and rebuilding, to those whose lives may be forever changed.

I have noted a fairly consistent response by those who live in harm's way...a reference to God, to grace, to a faith that believes that all will be well. One woman yesterday, when interviewed, said, "If He (Jesus, I assumed) can still the storm, he can keep me safe." A trust beyond all human understanding as we pray that all will find pathways to safety in renewal.

We are marking three Sundays which will emphasize the "Pathways to Renewal." Noting that this adventure we are on is a time to ask questions and live in them, to discern the direction of God for our life together and to learn again that we are WHO we are because of WHOSE we are in Jesus Christ!

Today, Word Alone, Scripture. The Word of God that is for us the Word of Life. For the Church, the first foundation is set in the Bible which is the narrative of God's love for us in Jesus Christ.

It is well to first to say what the Church is...most think, I believe, of a building like the one we are in at 2650 148th Avenue SE. But, that is not sufficient...as a people of book, the Word of God (which Luther called the true manger of Christ!) WE BELIEVE, TEACH, AND CONFESS, in the words of Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession---

"Our churches teach that the only holy Church is to remain forever.

The Church IS the congregation of saints in which the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are correctly administered."

With that grounding, there are 3 points with 3 word-memory hooks: **COMPASSION, SCARCITY, AND GENEROSITY**. All illustrated by our Gospel Reading, a miracle, the Feeding of the 4000.

Jesus has been about the mission of God---teaching, healing, preaching that He is the ONE. Along with him were the disciples, those who were coming to believe, and those who were just curious. I am not sure who took the count, but the report is that there were 4000 “men, besides women and children.” {One scholar of the Bible estimated there may have been close to 10,000 people!}

Compassion. Just before the story, Jesus went up the mountain, sat down, and the crowds brought those who were in need of healing (blind, deaf, unable to walk) and “cast them at his feet, and he healed them on the spot.” The people “gave glory to the God of Israel.”

Gospel logic has it that there is a connection between healing people and feeding them. The broken, like you and like me, healed and forgiven in Christ are hungry!

Jesus called the 12 to service. His heart aches for those who have been with him for three days. He observes and expresses compassion that stomach growling, hungry folk, about to travel might need faith along the way. Makes sense! (THREE DAYS are a marker.) The sense of it all is that love enfolds and serves the needs of others!

Scarcity. Even for us today it doesn't take long to figure that there may be a sense of deficit about to appear. Huge crowds, 12 learners, and the disciples seize the bottom line, black and white, tough outcome on the horizon. They said to Jesus, “Where are we to get enough bread to feed a crowd like this in the wilderness?” Sense of deficit, need a quick answer to the dilemma appearing which may lead to riot, seemingly not too willing to live with the question! A little like disciples in every age who sometimes see scarcity FIRST and live with a “deficit mentality.”

Jesus is patient and has them live with one more question: “How many loaves of bread do you have?” I suspect that may have been a long pause and then the words: “Seven and a couple of fish.” (SEVEN is a marker.)

Generosity. Now the disciples may have meant their response as a bit of repressed anger, a rejoinder that sounds like a joke---“All we got is seven loaves, couple of fish.” Jesus will use it all as ministry!

The crowds instructed to be seated...Jesus, in effect says a table prayer...gave thanks, broke them, gave them to the 12, spread to those who had waited and “all were filled, satisfied.” But, wait, more to come: grace abounds, where faith has received, and love is shared. They took up the leftovers---“seven baskets full” (Seven is one more marker.)

The story is the account of a miracle that becomes for the second generation Christians a story that sounds like the Lord's Supper. Jesus' word has authority, power, and things brand new happen which becomes a sign of the presence of God in Word. Spoken and written and shared! And when Jesus works through his disciples, grace abounds, not because of their superiority and plans; it is about amazing grace, sola gratis which comes through the Word of God which is our LIFE~FOREVER.

This is a Bible, the B-I-B-L-E, God's Word for you and me. Pathways to Renewal need a clear marker for the path we are walking and that pathways are always made light with love through God's Holy Word.

Here is the challenge: Be in Scripture, Word-Diggers who read and reread, pray and read again that the truth of the Gospel is nurture for the mission.

The story is told of a dear believer who was speaking to the pastor. “Pastor, I have gotten through the Word, the Bible, hundreds of times.” The response? “I am so glad; has the Word, the Bible, gotten through you?” Can you, can I live into that question? Can our answer mark a new beginning? It is time, it is God's time!

Like Abraham, God's speaks to us in the Word and through the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Here the Holy Spirit works to guide us into discipleship which is discipleFIT.

In this first of three sermons, I call you into Bible study and reflection which begin with the readings from each Sunday. Here is the feeding of the thousands, the millions who have called Jesus "Lord." Here is the place which we are drawn into the story of the One who died for us, lives for us, as if there were only ONE OF US.

Do you seek a vision for the congregation? It is that of the Gospel text. Each one, as one people of God, renewing the face of the world as the ONLY Gospel that many will read.

Our days ahead are filled with potential and opportunity as we walk together out of this place of feeding and into the world. There is only the call to COMPASSION which leads to service, no deficit, only the all sufficiency of God for us in Christ; the generosity which we are called to sure out of the words of Paul---"Owe no one anything, except to love on another." Live in the light, put on the new life of the Lord Jesus Christ, and be the forgiven, fully blessed people of God...living out of the Word of God which is the Word of Life. Amen!