

A miracle among us (Matthew 14:13-21)

God invites us to eat—but also to serve.

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I love the Gospel stories that fall during ordinary time. When summer days are long with light and a more leisurely pace is heated lush with joy. When gardens and lawns are draped in the wonder of liturgical green and bloom.

It's the graduations and weddings and pool days and sports camps and cookouts and line dances and happy hours and ice cream trucks for me. And the subtle reminders throughout the Gospels that Jesus and the disciples and all of those in the throngs of followers we read about also lived lives and were full of stories with their seasons and rhythms, too. And that Christ doesn't only come when we most expect: God is present in an ever-evolving and fresh web, the intricate design of the mundane and the miraculous held out each day.

The story, then, of Jesus feeding thousands from what seems to be only enough for two fish sandwiches and an extra piece of bread (an image forever etched in my mind thanks to Candace Simpson's indelible descriptions), feels familiar and welcome in the midst of life spent with meals and fellowship (at least in the northern hemisphere season) among the blankets and grass. It's a reminder that the cupboards are never bare in heaven, and that a little of this and a little of that might still make for a wacky cake or a quiche or a charcuterie board. That food, at least in my experience, tastes better and fills faster when it's shared among friends. And

that on occasions when we gather together in community, we can all receive God's abundance.

It seems a critical message among critical messages, given there is at least one version of this story in each of the Gospels. And in all of the synoptic accounts, certainly in today's, Jesus is clear that the disciples should be involved in the feeding: "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."

God invites us to eat—a miracle. But God also invites us to serve.

It's a mindset that empowers us to rebuke the imposed limits of deficit, need, scarcity, and lack—and asks us to look more closely at what we have and hold together. It is as if Jesus is sharing a message akin to a certain kind of asset-based community fellowship. What is it to consider the miracle of this moment as also taking seriously a mindset of the resources, gifts, talents, and people already in community, with an approach that is based in place and starts with relationships and relationality, that works inclusively to make sure that everyone is involved and no one is left to the periphery?

It sounds not only like the story but like a vision of the miraculous that can manifest among us now. To think—we can be hosts of God's presence, because God is already here, with us.

And what then of this perspective for the church? What would it look like to start not necessarily with the "Jesus-shaped hole in your heart" but instead with the theology of shared meals and sunsets and summer lawns together? To learn to look to the lessons of being present to where we are, with the baseline assumption that there is already enough? To be a body of Christ that magnifies and multiplies the resources of what we've already been blessed with from his hand to begin with?

What if we are already the miracle in God's hands, and what if we took seriously the instructions to give one another something to eat?