

I love Jesus' deep compassion. Many of us are familiar with today's beautiful, powerful story of Jesus' ministry, that He miraculously fed a huge crowd of people with very little food. But part of this story that is often overlooked is that before this miracle of feeding the crowd, Jesus healed the sick. Jesus was on his way away from the crowds - he needed some time for himself and alone. Jesus often needed to go away on his own and pray, to take care of himself in a deep way. Couldn't we all use some of that time away to pray and tend to our spirits?

But Jesus was so deeply moved, so absolutely convicted in his body and in his actions, that these people needed healing, that he did it. That even before he could perform one of the most famous miracles of his ministry, Jesus was filled with a gut-wrenching compassion to heal the sick.

The word for compassion that's used in this story translates to something like "you care so much and so deeply that your insides twist and your gut aches for the other person." It goes beyond just empathy, there is a body, and gut knowing component that Jesus cannot ignore, it compels him to action. Compassion is not simply a feeling, it's the catalyst for action. Every time we see this word for compassion in the gospel, it precedes action.

And this compassion, while certainly powerful, is perhaps unfamiliar to many of us. Take a moment to think, when is the last time you were so convicted of something that you felt it in your body and you could not ignore it? That you had a physical reaction or impulse to take action and you simply had to follow that call to action?

I am willing to bet that the times in which we feel this deep, physical compassion, it is because of someone or something outside of ourselves. Because of our neighbors, of something not right in the human condition, we feel in our bodies that we must act. And we must be brave and courageous, loving and giving enough to follow that gut centered calling to act in love of these neighbors.

Jesus' actions and ministry are all rooted in loving, active, tangible care for humanity.

If we are to be the body of Christ in the world, then we must be moved to action too. Jesus provides us words of comfort and a spiritual home, absolutely yes. But the real miracle of Jesus and His work in our world, is the physical, tangible ministering he did for other people. We of course gain spiritual comfort from prayer, from words and thoughts. But the stories, the relationships, the actual action we take to live out our faith is what lingers. The stories of how Jesus and other faithful people show up and act out of love for their neighbors is what really gets at our hearts, our cores, our guts. Stories matter. Actions create stories. Actions change the world. It's not about whether or not an action is comfortable for you, or aligns with certain thoughts or feelings you have on a particular matter, it is about showing up for our sick and hungry and aching neighbors and taking action in the ways that will keep them alive. Oftentimes it appears to be the simplest things that make the biggest difference. Heal the sick. Feed the hungry. Wear the mask. Make a call, send a text. Do something for the sake of loving your neighbor.

But of course, we are never alone in our actions as we are called to love our neighbors. Jesus is very present with us, in our humanness, as we show up for one another. Our story today is, of course, not only is Jesus' healing of the sick and deep compassion for His fellow humans, but also Jesus' miraculous ability to transform a tiny amount of food into a feast to fill thousands of people. Let's think about the scale of this miracle. We know this story as the feeding of the 5,000, but let's be clear, that is only 5,000 men. That number does not include the women or children who were part of this crowd too. So if we estimate that for each man there is also a woman, or a spouse, and a couple of kids, we're now talking closer to 20,000 people.

It also shows the limitations of humankind, of only counting men, when really, we are all children of God, male and female God creates us, and it makes the scope of Jesus' miracle that much more absolutely astounding when we realize just how many human people are served and fed by Jesus in this time.

Feeding 20,000 people off of what my seminary professor Rolf Jacobson lightheartedly called, "about 2.5 fish sandwiches" is an incredible and miraculous feat. And 2.5 fish sandwiches is a lot easier for us to visualize - I envision a mid-road trip drive-thru stop for sustenance with the family, and the bag contains the leftovers of what appeared bigger to our eyes than our stomachs on the move. What can easily fit in that drive thru bag is what was multiplied to such abundance that it fed and satisfied 20,000 people, with a few baskets of leftovers too.

When we think about our own states of being these days, it often feels like we need to perform that feat of satisfying 20,000 people with a bag of slightly cooled-off drive thru sandwiches. The expectations and demands are so very high, and yet we feel we have so little to give. It feels like we've been giving and giving of ourselves for months now, adapting and learning and being on the internet and dealing with rapid change and coping with uncomfortable feelings that may not have ever popped up for us before, or our usual ways of coping with uncomfortable feelings are no longer available to us or sustain us in the way they once did. We are raising our families, parenting our kids, making sure they keep up with their learning and healthy social connections, keeping our own jobs, keeping our homes tidy, staying in touch with people and places, grieving our losses, tending to family and friends who are struggling, all these massive things that have changed so drastically in a short amount of time. That rapid pace and huge, unprecedented level of expectation eats away at us, bit by bit, until we feel like all we have left to give are the crumbs that settle at the bottom of the bag.

That feeling of not having much to give at all is never easy or fun. But Jesus shows up and thrives with what little things we have to give. That is a true miracle of Jesus' ability to show up and sustain us - that even when we feel like we're just the crumbs at the bottom of the bag, Jesus creates a feast, of life-giving love and sustenance beyond our imagining. That when we would normally just tell everyone to go away and figure out their own food, Jesus provides an abundant feast that satisfies people in the thousands. When we are at our lowest, our toughest, our most exhausted and feeling like we have nothing left to give or nowhere else to turn, Jesus shows up in miracles. Jesus takes what little we have to offer and multiplies it before our very eyes. Jesus never shames or belittles or looks down upon our humanness, our humbleness, Jesus makes things happen with whatever it is we can offer. If 2.5 fish sandwiches can become a feast for 20,000, then what more can Jesus do within you and in our world with the tiniest bits of ourselves we still have to offer?

It's not easy to have this outlook, to have this faith that Jesus can work miracles with even our tiniest, most exhausted pieces of ourselves that remain. But think about who Jesus heals, reveals himself to, who Jesus chooses to do ministry with throughout the Gospels? The people who are forgotten, downtrodden, looked down upon in society, the outcasts from the people in the majority. Jesus calls out the people who take advantage of others, who abuse power and money, who ignore or hurt their fellow humans for the sake of their own personal gain. Jesus is literally so gut-wrenchingly overcome with compassion for his fellow humans that he goes out of his way to heal their sicknesses and feed their hungry families. These are the people for whom Jesus shows up and does miraculous things - the hurting, the hungry, the downtrodden and defeated, the people who cry for justice and mercy, the neighbors who are truly most in need of supporting what it is to be human.

So whether you are feeling like all you have left are crumbs, or you are ready to to prepare a whole feast for the family of God, know that Jesus is

with you. Jesus works in miraculous ways, showing us how to feel deep compassion for one another and take action for the sake of loving and healing the people around us. Jesus also works within us in miraculous ways, taking the small parts of ourselves that we have to offer, even when we are exhausted and hungry and overcome with feelings, and creating a feast of life-giving love and sustenance. For these miraculous works, for Jesus' deep compassion for humanity, for the sure reliance we have on Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord, we give you thanks, O God. Amen.