

**“Giving ourselves away – Uncomfortable – How willing are you to follow Jesus?”**

**Nineth Sunday after Pentecost**

Sunday – August 2, 2020

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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Matthew 14:13-21

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Well today we are beginning a sermon series on the uncomfortableness that we can feel as people of faith, and God is providing us with what we need to become more fully devoted followers of Jesus. In the seven-week series we will explore some of the great stories of our faith from the gospel of St. Matthew. I believe it is a timely series. I don't know about you but uncomfortable is how I would describe myself during these times.

I am wondering whether or not there is going to be football this fall. It makes me uncomfortable. Masks and beards – uncomfortable. Preaching a sermon on the feeding of the five thousand knowing that our community cannot gather in person to share holy communion makes me uncomfortable. People being judged by their skin color instead of the content of their character, makes me uncomfortable. Name calling and shaming, makes me uncomfortable. Dividing us by ethnicity and race and sexual identity, political faction, or what we believe about God, makes me uncomfortable. Protests turning into riots makes me uncomfortable. The unknown makes me uncomfortable.

There is a lot to be uncomfortable about. You can tell that people are on the edge, their cranky, angrier than normal. Politicians of differing political parties can't seem to agree on anything, even things that a normal person would seem that would be easy to agree on. Living during this time of Covid-19 pandemic we plan to do one thing and then there is the latest spike in Covid comes our way. Remember when we thought things would be back to normal by Easter?! The world seems out of whack.

The word comfort comes from two Latin words, “com” and “fortis”. Literally meaning to strengthen. Uncomfortable then means feelings of weakness, frailty, exhaustion. Does that sound familiar to you?

Jesus was not comfortable as well in our gospel reading for today. Jesus is pulling away from the crowds to a quiet place because he is mourning the beheading of his cousin and colleague John the Baptist. John was considered a prophet. A prophet in times when Israel had not heard any prophetic voices for hundreds of years. Hundreds of years. And then comes John proclaiming repentance in the wilderness. John spoke with conviction about the need for personal responsibility and repentance for both common person as well as kings and rulers. He issued a call to a new order led by a coming Messiah and Savior for whom he was preparing the way. And in sadness and loss, Jesus wants to get away from it all. But the people follow him to his quiet place with their needs and spiritual hungers. They hunger for the things of God and they see in Jesus an answer to that hunger. Rather than become annoyed at their intrusion, (like his disciples do), Jesus responds with compassion and comfort. He offers healing, love, teaching and serving. The crowd hungers for the things of God and he gives them the things of God. And Jesus does it with nothing, well hardly nothing.

But first some context. Elisha, the successor of the great prophet Elijah during the time of King Herod, a thousand years before Jesus had fed 100 men with 20 barley loaves during a famine. "Give it to the people and let them eat", he said. But his servants said to him, "How can I set this before hundred people?" It sounds familiar doesn't it? We have nothing here, only five loaves and two fish, we can't afford it, we don't have enough. But Elisha says, "Give it to the people and let them eat, for this is what the Lord says, 'They will eat and have some left over.'"

And now comes Jesus, when some, including his disciples, considered him a prophet. After hours of teach and healing, with the crowd getting restless, the disciples getting cranky. Normally they would address Jesus with the respectful title of "Lord". But not here, in this part of Matthew's gospel. They order him, "Just tell them to go away!" they say to Jesus. They don't believe that Jesus can meet the people's physical needs. The disciples again without any respectful address just tell Jesus the facts, they can't do it, they don't have enough.

A young man comes forward who didn't have much. Two loaves and five fish. Scarcely enough for such a great crowd, but what he did have, he offered to Jesus and thousands of hungry people were fed. Jesus tells the disciples, "You give them something to eat." In the Greek text the word "you" is emphasized. And the people were comforted.

At the time of Jesus many people believed the Messiah would come in the spirit of those prophets of old like Elijah and Elisha. Now Jesus stand among the crowd and tells the disciples to feed the people with what is provided, not what they hoped for, not

what they need, but what they have. What their current situation is, the uncomfortable situation that it is.

Writer and professor and popular speaker, Tony Campolo, once spoke recently in Harrisburg for Christian Churches United. He tells the story about being invited to a women's conference as the main speaker. The women were being challenged to raise money for a particular mission project. While Campolo was sitting on the dais, the chairperson turned to him and asked him if he would pray for God's blessing as they considered their individual responses to their goal. Campolo stood up and to the utter amazement of everyone present graciously said to them "no." He came to the microphone and said, "You already have the resources necessary to complete the mission project right here in this room. It would be inappropriate to ask for God's blessing, when in fact God has already blessed you with the abundance and the means to achieve the goal. The necessary gifts are already in your hands. As soon as we take the offering, the mission project, we will thank God for freeing us to be generous, responsible, and accountable stewards of what we were called to be as Christian disciples. And they did.

Jesus is Lord even of our physical needs. Jesus cares about hungry people and does something, and he motivates his disciples, his followers of Jesus to do something. And the church has been involved in alleviating hunger around the world for 2000 years. And if it were not for conflict, violence, and war as well as weather related reasons like draught, or flood, we would have even made more progress. But if there is anything to learn in this story for Christians it is this... We should not patronize Jesus with talk of not having enough, that somehow the Lord of Life is limited in what he can do.

The disciples thought that they were limited with only seven items, two fish and five loaves. Jesus is teaching them and us to count to eight and beyond. To multiply the mission and ministry of Jesus. And, disciples of Jesus are facilitators of the miracles of Jesus. Jesus takes what is there and provides enough for everyone.

Martin Luther in his Small Catechism, his explanation of the Sixth Commandment said "We are to fear and love God, so that we neither endanger nor harm the lives of our neighbors, but instead help and support our neighbor in all of life's needs."

Are you uncomfortable these days? Then be the comfort, love God, love people, rely on Jesus, be his partner in ministry, give yourself away for the sake of neighbor and world. Miracles will happen. People will be fed. The world will become a better place.

Jesus feeds hungry people in deserted places, uncomfortable places, and the power of this story is that since that time, the church, your church, has lead the way in feeding people, caring for the poor, the hungry, the sick, the widow, the orphaned, the refugee. Caring and loving and serving each other. We've offered comfort as Jesus taught.

Yes, these are uncomfortable time, but sometimes God wants you to be uncomfortable. It is during such times that it forces you to have the clarity of thought, to reach out to Him, to seek your way in the darkness, to rely on the Lord who is your shepherd who leads you through dark valleys.

If you are uncomfortable, maybe God is stretching your perception, calling you into action, pushing you, pushing you to do more, inviting you to give yourself away for the sake of those who are hungry.

How willing are you to follow Jesus? Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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