

9th Sunday after Pentecost, yr. a, 8/2/2020

Genesis 32:22-31; Matthew 14:13-21

“... you give them something to eat.” – Rev. Dr. Deborah M. Jenks

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When do we ever have enough? How do we ever know when we have enough – enough to live, enough to love, enough to thrive as children of God? I imagine it's when we're satisfied, when we're full. But then how do we know when that is?

Having enough and knowing when enough is enough is an over-riding concern in our lives – in each and every human life, an over-riding concern of our way of life as people of faith. It's at the root of every hope we have in God's grace, mercy, and saving grace. And having enough and knowing when enough is enough is really the obsession of our culture and world – the basis of whole economies and the motivation for all politics and conquest and all efforts to secure “our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.” It is what our freedoms and free markets are for, what they are meant to guarantee - having enough, more than enough to live free from want and care and pain, free to do what it takes to be fulfilled as human beings. Our culture – the world around us – holds up and celebrates achievement, wealth, power, security as a promise to us of a kind of immortality that will leave us unscathed, unscarred, untouched by disease, harm, disaster ... yet, in spite of all that is promised us, we come to those times in the night alone, bereft, by the river crossing, where both the prospect of going forward and going back are choices which promise no relief or satisfaction.

It was the over-riding concern for Jacob – the force that propelled his living and all his choices in life. Jacob – younger son of Isaac, grandson of Abraham – was heir to the promise of God to Abraham to make of his offspring a great nation, a people by whom the nations of the world would be blessed. Nurtured on that promise, and concern for his share in that promise, encouraged by the favor of his mother Rebekah, Jacob did all he could – manipulated, lied, deceived, cheated his twin brother Esau out of his blessing and birthright to get his share. And then with his brother angry enough to kill him, Jacob flees and goes to live with his uncle Laban. And he and Laban wrestle over land and property and Jacob marries both of Laban's daughters Leah and Rachel and has many children by them and their two slave women. And when things get unmanageable with his father-in-law, Jacob is forced to flee. Jacob finds himself caught between the hostility of Laban and Esau, about to cross the Jordan River to return to that land promised by God so long ago – in fear of losing it all to his brother Esau. And there, at night, having sent his wives and children and servants and all his household goods ahead in hopes of appeasing Esau, Jacob wrestles with what turns out to be the Lord God.

In that deep dark night of our souls, at those times when we can no longer pretend everything is all right, when life seems to have turned to dust and ashes, when we come up against the consequences of our actions or inactions, those times when we come face to face with our weaknesses, our failures, our sins, our doubts, and fears of not measuring up, of not being smart enough, quick enough,

good enough, of not having enough, not having what others seem to have, when we come face to face with all that is beyond our control – in that deepest time of night what and whom do we wrestle with? What, who do we grab hold of?

Rejected by his neighbors in Nazareth who thought he was getting above himself, and then being told of John the Baptist's arrest and beheading by Herod Antipas, Jesus enters his own dark time of grief and weariness, and goes off to a desert place by himself - goes off to get away from it all. But the crowds have heard about John too, and in their fear and need and even terror, they follow Jesus.

They followed Jesus. As I hear these words from the Gospel, I wonder, do I follow Jesus for the same reasons as those crowds? Are we who call ourselves disciples following Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, are we following him as much from those fears and grief that come in the deepest night, as we are following because we desire to share in his saving work? Are we maybe following him as a kind of personal insurance of salvation plan in the face of all that compels us to make sure we have "enough"?

Like Jacob, I think we need to always be wrestling with the truth of this – because like with Jacob, God wrestles us into facing it. Jacob has tried all his life up to that night by the River Jordan, to control his own destiny, to make God's promises come true for him by all the power that he, Jacob, can find and use in

himself. But it's not enough to fulfill the promise God has made, not enough to save him. So God and Jacob wrestle and strive together, until Jacob recognizes that God has never ever let him go no matter what. God has been always and continues to be present in his life. God loves him no matter what he does, or how he's failed. And Jacob finally surrenders, lets go of himself and becomes who God made him to be – becomes Israel – the one whom God rules.

And it's much the same with Jesus' disciples. Even in the midst of his grief and weariness, Jesus on seeing the crowds has compassion, and gives of himself, curing their diseases. But the disciples, well the disciples pretty soon reach their limit. They want Jesus to send the crowds away to fend for themselves. There's just not enough of Jesus – of what Jesus is giving – to go around. Maybe they seem to want to save some of it for themselves?! Maybe they're fearful that they'll be overwhelmed or risk failure in the eyes of the crowd or Jesus?!

Jesus tells the disciples, "Do not send the people away, but give them something to eat yourselves." And out of their sense and fear of scarcity, they reply, "But all we have are 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish." And Jesus tells them, "Bring them here to me."

It brings me up short to think of all the times and ways in the face of what is needful and those in need, I've said, "But all I have is... all we have is ...We

don't have enough ...” It makes me ask myself how much am I hanging on to out of a sense, a fear of scarcity that keeps me holding back and not sharing even as I work hard to acquire. Do I ever end up sending people away hungry? Are we ever doing that?

As Christ's church we face this danger – temptation really, of letting our sense that there may not be enough to go around, letting our presumption of scarcity rule our living. This sense of scarcity can lead us to hold back rather than share what God gives us so that no one goes away hungry, hurting, without. Whether its pinching pennies because of a budget deficit, or holding something of ourselves back because we're not sure we have enough of anything – time, money, space, knowledge, other resources – we are in danger of missing what God is doing right before our eyes. But thank God, God doesn't leave us alone in our sense of scarcity and fears of not enough. God in God's mercy and great love gathers us patiently, persistently over and over again as community as church in worship and prayer and never lets go of us until we realize, until we know and experience the abundance of grace and salvation we are given to share.

Having the crowds to sit down on the grass, Jesus took the 5 loaves and 2 fish, looked up into heaven and blessed them, broke them, and gave them to his disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled;

and they took up all that was left over, the broken pieces, twelve baskets full.  
And those who ate were about 5,000 ...

Take ... Bless ... Break ... Give and Share. It's the way God works in our lives and in the world. Take, bless, break, give over and over and over, God wrestling with us to do it to share in it. It's the heart of the salvation offered us and all in Christ Jesus.

TAKE – Jesus takes what we offer, whatever we offer no matter how much or how little or even why we offer it.

BLESS – and whatever we offer Jesus blesses in offering to God with thanksgiving for it. He doesn't evaluate or judge it, criticize or reject it. He gives thanks for it gathering all of us and all that we are into our gift.

BREAK – and breaks our gifts, our lives open with that blessing. So we are not left as we were, but re-made, renewed ... Breaks through our cover-ups, and fears, and poses, and bravado, and beliefs that we can be self-sufficient and take care of ourselves and those we love and brings forth abundance – more than we could ever hope for or imagine.

GIVE – Everything in abundance is given back for us to share, for all who hunger and thirst. In this giving God in Jesus says to us and to this world ... this is all that I am, all that I have and I give it all to you. Eat and be filled. Share all this, share me with everyone – with the world, with all who hunger and thirst to be made whole, to be filled, to be reconciled, healed and loved. It is way more than enough. Amen.

