

Pentecost 22C (10/16/2016)

Genesis 32:22-31

Psalm 121

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Luke 18:1-8

The persistence of injustice is wearying, but our hope is persistent, too. By our prayerful endurance, we confront the injustices that impede God's kingdom and participate in its fulfillment.

Many thanks to Resounding Joy and Kevin Doerr for your beautiful retelling of the miraculous feeding of the crowds! This story must have made quite an impression on the early church because it's the only miracle account that found its way into all four Gospels. And why not? **It's a striking portrayal of God's absurd and indiscriminate generosity, God's desire to bless the masses with daily bread and mercy. And, it's a powerful encouragement to faith. What seems like scarcity to us is abundance in Jesus' hands; where we are skeptical, Jesus sees only possibility.** So, in the midst of our worrying and planning and micromanaging, the story of the miraculous feeding reminds us again that all we have comes by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.¹

But Christ does not act alone. "Send the crowd away," his disciples insist, "so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place." But Jesus replies, "You give them something to eat."² *You.* Apparently, discipleship is not a spectator sport. **Blessed and broken by Jesus, a little bit goes a long way. Still, someone has to make the delivery.** In this way, the story of the miraculous feeding convicts all of Jesus'

¹ Bishop Wayne Miller, Metropolitan Chicago Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

² Luke 9:12-13.

followers in every time and place, calling on us to recognize our partnership with Christ in performing the will of God. **The work of the kingdom is God's work, yes, and it's in our hands.**

As we observe World Food Day today, we praise God for the Earth's abundance, but we also lament that 800 million hungry people still do not share equitably in it. What's more, we wonder about our own place in a global system that continues to provide plenty for some and too little for others. And, even as we remember our call to the ministry of feeding, we are uncertain of our ability to make lasting change in the face of such an immense injustice.

The persistence of injustice is wearying, and we may find ourselves on the verge of giving up hope. For this reason, disciples in every generation need precisely the kind of encouragement we hear in our Gospel from Luke today. Jesus tells a parable "about [our] need to pray always and not to lose heart." An unjust judge ignores the cries of a widow in his midst until she finally wears him down by her tenacity and he grants her the justice she demands. It's an illustration of the old adage that the squeaky wheel gets the grease. But, it also has something to say about God. *If even an unjust judge will grant justice to a widow out of sheer exasperation, Jesus implies, how much more will God, who is fundamentally just, hear your cries for justice and respond?* In other words, **be bold and persistent in prayer, trusting that in time God will bring the kingdom to bear fully on the world.**

This, of course, raises the question of the purpose and effectiveness of prayer. Certainly, those of us with enough to eat have a responsibility to pray earnestly for those who do not, to plead with God for loaves and fish to reach everyone in the

crowd. But we cannot expect God to enact justice all on God's own, as though God were a divine butler who does our bidding without our participation. No, **the prayers of our hearts and mouths come to full expression in our actions. So, if you're going to pray for God to move a mountain like hunger, you'd better be ready for God to hand you a shovel.**

Dear church, **the kingdom of God is already among us.**³ **And, by the influence of the Holy Spirit, our hope is as stubborn as the widow in Jesus' parable.** If we were going to give up on hunger, we would have given up a long time ago. But there is still a vision for the appointed time,⁴ God's vision of a world made whole, where mourning and crying and pain will be no more⁵ – indeed, where hunger will be no more. So, pray fervently and don't lose heart. Live by your faith, and allow your faith to lead you into a life of faithfulness and love for your neighbors, especially those who are hungry.

³ Luke 17:21.

⁴ Habakkuk 2:3.

⁵ Revelation 21:4.