

8.2.20 L18P9 Jesus Feeds Our Deepest Need

- At first the shelves were picked clean of toilet paper, hand sanitizer, and disinfectant wipes.
 - You remember those early days of the pandemic when the lockdowns began in March when we needed essentials, but there was a sudden shortage of some things
 - NOW if you go to the store, you have a good chance to be able to buy at least two out of three of the things that we scarce
- However now after months of either shut-downs, or slow-downs, different things have become scarce during the coronavirus pandemic
 - Bored people have used their stay-at-home time to do home improvements, and so now there is a shortage of lumber
 - And now if you are able to go to the store, because the United States mint and the neighborhood banks have had shorter hours, and less money has circulated because fewer people are shopping... now there is a shortage of coins, and businesses have signs up asking for exact change
 - An addition, during this time there is also a shortage of puppies. People needed something safe to hug, and which brings smiles and joys into stay-at-home lives, and so the animal shelters have almost no puppies to adopt
- Our needs have shifted during the pandemic.
- Our needs have shifted from survival needs to get through the day, to the need for something to do, and the need to give something a safe hug
- Those are important needs, and today's gospel reading lifts up needs that are even more important
 - In today's story, Jesus was tired, and he was grieving.
 - His cousin John the Baptist had been cruelly executed for being a prophet who spoke Kingdom-of-God truth to nasty King Herod's kingdom-of-earth rule that was maintained by power and corruption
 - So while Jesus was trying to go by boat to a quiet place to mourn and pray, the crowds in the towns and villages ran along the shore and met him when his boat landed

- There was to be no rest for Jesus that day
- But then looking out at the crowd of people who had followed him and who had now gathered around him and his disciples, *Jesus had compassion for them, and he saw their needs*
- So tired, grieving Jesus, saw their needs and healed the sick people in the crowds
- Then as evening was approaching, the disciples encouraged Jesus to send the crowd of people on their way so that they might scatter and find something to eat
- Instead, Jesus startled the disciples by saying, “*They need not go away; YOU give them something to eat.*”
- And of course, the disciples were bewildered. They only had five loaves and two fish.
- So Jesus had the crowds sit down, he blessed and broke the meager food and shared it, “and all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children [Mt. 14:20-21].”
- The hungry were fed... their needs were met by the abundance of God’s compassion in the person of Jesus Christ
- In today’s gospel reading we hear that seeing the need for health and food, Jesus had compassion, and responded to broken bodies and hungry bellies with abundant healing and food
- That is what the Kingdom of Heaven looks like – abundant love that sees our need, and responds with healing, food, and even and especially abundant forgiveness and life
- In these days of pandemic when we have gone from shortages of toilet paper, to shortages of puppies, the days often seem long because we can’t do many of the things that we used to do to fill our time
 - In our house, with many fewer church meetings in the evenings, and the ones we do have are usually held by video conferencing, I am watching much more TV
 - But with even a hundred or so TV channels, sometimes there isn’t much that interests me, so we often find ourselves tuning in to the lesser known channels, like the history channel

- Wedged in between episodes of antique hunters known as American Pickers, there was a fascinating commercial that told the story of an obscure historical event
- In 1847 the Choctaw people, who just several years before had been marched in a long trail of tears from their land to an Indian reservation – the Choctaw Indians heard of the terrible potato famine in Ireland
- Thousands of Irish people were dying of starvation, so the Choctaw people scrapped together 170 precious dollars, and sent them to Ireland to people they had never seen or met, to provide food during the famine
- The Irish have long-remembered that wonderful gift in their time of need, and the Irish have even memorialized the Choctaw gift with a sculpture of nine eagle feathers.
- But now this year, when the coronavirus has devastated our Native American brothers and sisters with rampant illness and death, several months ago the Irish people gathered almost \$2,000,000 and gave it to the Choctaws Nation to help them to survive and battle the pandemic
- Now you may wonder why I told you this story.
- It's an example of the Choctaw years ago hearing about and responding to the need of the Irish in the potato famine, has resulted in the Irish seeing and responding to the need of the Choctaw Indians now during the pandemic – and it is wonderful and inspiring story of people who have experienced a gift in a time of need, *paying it forward*
- Some of us probably have Irish or Native American ancestry, but all of us are more than a mix of ancestral countries and nations, because we have all been adopted – we have all been adopted by Holy Baptism into the Kingdom of God, where Christ sees our hungering need for life – and in Jesus Christ crucified and raised God so abundantly gives it.
- And as beneficiaries and recipients of such an outpouring of God's love to us in our deepest need, might we then see and respond to the needs of others? Might we pay it forward?
- We cannot repay God, but in Christ feeding our deepest hunger, out of gratefulness we have been called to see and respond to the needs of others

- As Martin Luther said, “God does not need our good works... but our neighbor does.”