

Trust in God's Goodness
Matthew 14:13-21

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August 2, 2020

God is good. *Response* - All the time.
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I started this way because God is good all the time and if there is a time we need to be reminded of God's goodness, it is now. God's goodness is seen so clearly in our gospel reading this morning of the feeding of the five thousand. It really should be called the feeding of the 8 thousand or the ten thousand because women and children are also fed on top of the five thousand men.

Picture the scene for a moment – most likely a grassy hillside filled with people – a lot of people – no social distancing. In your mind, perhaps take a stadium of people and spread them out on the hillside. These people have followed Jesus from their towns because they have heard about this amazing teacher and preacher. Can you see Jesus moving among them curing as he goes? People waiting for him to approach looking to see if he was coming. Then as the end of the day comes, and the disciples - probably hungry themselves, tell Jesus to send the crowds away since they are in a deserted place. If they go into the nearby villages, the people will be able to find something to eat. But Jesus tells them that the people don't need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

The text says that the disciples say “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” I think what they said was more like - Feed them? All these people? Are you crazy? All we have are 5 loaves and 2 fish. That's barely enough for us. They need to leave. But Jesus has the crowd sit down and he blesses the food and all eat. There are even 12 baskets of leftovers.

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Do we really trust in the goodness of God? Do we trust in the abundance of God? It is really hard right now as our economic situation in this country gets worse. This week, I have heard of several people being laid off. They had made it these many months of quarantine only then to lose their jobs. Other lost their jobs at the beginning of quarantine and are still unemployed. Many have become homeless. News articles are filled with stories of families where all the adults lost their jobs and they were barely making it with the help of unemployment benefits - some of which have now ended as of Friday. The COVID-19 protections against eviction has ended. And still COVID-19 infections are increasing across the country. The re-openings are being paused or rolled back which means that many of those lost jobs are not coming back anytime soon.

And so it is hard to see the goodness of God right in the midst of all this. Where is the goodness of God as we see people unable to work, unable to care for their families and

wondering what the future will hold? My friends the goodness God is with us. God is there with God's abundance, and we must be careful not to get in the way of it even when the circumstances are overwhelming. I believe this is what happened to the disciples. Feed 5000 plus with 5 loaves and 2 fish? No way. Send them away. But Jesus has the crowd sit down and they eat.

What we face in this world when it comes to hunger, injustice, sickness, fear, grief – you name it – can be overwhelming and the temptation to say – send them away and to give up is strong and that is when we must listen to Jesus and see if he is telling us to have the crowd sit down and give them something to eat. I think that we can block God's goodness when we don't trust in it. God will still find a way, but I don't know about you, I want to be part of God's way.

Here is an example. Do you know that we have enough food in this world to feed everyone? Then why are people hungry? Well, globally 30-40% of all food is wasted. In less developed countries, the waste happens because of the lack of infrastructure and knowledge to keep food fresh.¹ Distribution of food is also a huge problem. We have had this problem for years and can't solve it or maybe we don't want to spend the money to solve it. Perhaps we humans are getting in the way of God's goodness.

I saw our getting in the way on a smaller level with the toilet paper shortage in the first months of the pandemic. It wasn't that there wasn't enough toilet paper. We didn't have a sudden influx of millions of people into the US so that we needed more toilet paper. The problem was that some of us had a lot of it and some had none. Let me tell you that pull to hold on to the toilet paper was strong. I had to steel myself to leave toilet paper in the store because I knew we had enough at home.

How do we not get in the way of God's goodness? How do we have the crowds sit down when there is only 5 loaves and 2 fish to eat? I think we do this work, because of our relationship with Jesus. Even though the disciples had different ideas about what to do with the crowd, they did as Jesus asked. They distributed the food and then they collected the leftovers. They had spent time with him. They had listened to his teachings. They trusted him and stayed when they could have walked away.

I think that can be true for us as well. When we spend time with Jesus in prayer and with his words through in scripture, we are in relationship with Jesus and that relationship guides us to hear his voice even at the times when we say this just cannot be done.

It doesn't mean that this work becomes easy and food magically appears. For example, in the St. Peter's Food Pantry, there are times when we send people away without food usually when they come late and the volunteers are exhausted. However, more often

¹ <https://medium.com/@jeremyerdman/we-produce-enough-food-to-feed-10-billion-people-so-why-does-hunger-still-exist-8086d2657539>

that not, everyone is fed even when we start out with bare shelves. People – some we know and some we don't - show up bringing food. Those are the times when we trust in God's goodness.

So listen carefully my friends for Jesus' voice when you find yourselves afraid to trust in God's goodness. Pray. Read scripture. Study. Talk with others facing the same challenge. See what God is asking you to do and do your best not to get in the way.

- Perhaps you will do some research on the world hunger problem and see how you can be part of the solution to improve infrastructure and distribution.
- Maybe you will take a meal to a neighbor who you know is struggling.
- Perhaps you will be the one who finds an amazing way to save the environment, stand up to injustice, or to care for the vulnerable. God's goodness goes way beyond food.
- Maybe the next time you faced with a situation that seems impossible, instead of giving up, will you pause, pray and listen to what Jesus has to say.

Always remember.

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