



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

A Devotion During This Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, August 2, 2020

Discipleship's Demand

by Garland F. Pierce

Matthew 14:13-21

14:13 Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns.

14:14 When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.

14:15 When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves."

14:16 Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."

14:17 They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish."

14:18 And he said, "Bring them here to me."

14:19 Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.

14:20 And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full.

14:21 And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Discipleship demands our meeting the needs of those whom we find before us. Period. Responding to the call of God's realm is not always easy. Jesus desired some alone time to grieve the government-sanctioned killing of his innocent cousin, John, but the profound needs of the crowd of followers made it necessary for him to put even his private grief on hold. The

disciples, calculating the time of day with the hunger of the people and the amount of resources before them, prudently suggested to Jesus that a viable and sustainable strategic plan for this outdoor ministry retreat would be to dismiss the crowd so the hungry ones could fend for themselves and meet their own need. To that reasonable proposal, Jesus responds, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."

John's gospel reveals the source, a boy with his lunch. Matthew's gospel leaves it to our imaginations to figure out how the disciples produced five loaves of bread and two fish; but, Matthew does illustrate to us how we are to respond to discipleship's demand even in the midst of apparent scarcity and profound need. Even while being fully aware that in the face of great need what we have to offer is not enough in and of itself, still offer it to Christ.

It was true before the pandemic; but, now it has been laid bare; there is deep hunger and profound need in the world. The vast majority long simply to have enough, enough food, enough money, enough medicine. In the midst of the majority's longing and hunger, there is the powerful minority that seem unmoved by this reality, only working for and planning so that they and theirs can have more, even in abundance. They blame the majority for not having more and for wanting enough. The majority's need for enough is seen as a threat to the minority's desire to have more in excess. Sadly, some would-be disciples of Christ theologize about abundance and prosperity rather than offering to Christ their loaves and fish for his use. They would dismiss the majority, encouraging them to fend for themselves. They say there is not enough here for everyone.

Theologian Frederick Buechner once said, "Vocation is the place where our deep gladness meets the world's deep need." We must discern what we are being called to do and who we are being called to be in this critical moment.

How we are oriented to perceive the current situation will influence how we do ministry in far more profound ways than whether we do it digitally/virtually or in person. How we are oriented to discern the current situation will influence how we respond as good government or a just society. Left solely to what most of us individually have, there is not nor will there be enough—whether we speak of loaves and fish or money, masks, COVID-19 tests, or personal protective equipment. Individually, there is probably not even enough time. However, is there enough will? Is there enough compassion to perceive and empathize with the present needs? If so, our will and compassion along with our offering of the loaves and fish we do have to the master multiplier and caterer, Jesus Christ, somehow has the potential to yield a banquet where all eat and still there is more left over.

TALK: Take a moment to be silent, reflect, and share (write down)—Where does your deep gladness meet the world's deep need?

PRAY:

**Gracious God, take our lives and our gifts.
Use them to accomplish more than we could possibly imagine,
so that, through us, Your kingdom might come
and Your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven. Amen**

adapted from <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2011/07/offering-prayer-matthew-1422-33.html>

ACT:

1. Based on your answers regarding where you feel God is calling you to respond to a need in the world, come up with a plan and start taking your next faithful steps. For those US citizens, here are some practical actions to take: Participate in the current democratic processes (voter registration, voting, completing the 2020 census and encouraging others to do so—See: <http://www.amev-alert.org> and <https://2020census.gov>.) For everyone, practice social distancing as much as possible, wash your hands often, and wear face covering to help prevent the spread of COVID-19—See: <http://www.amechealth.org>.

2. See also the activity that accompanies this devotion.

3. Revisit the Psalm 23 Challenge first issued as part of the March 22, 2020 set of resources.

Song:

Take My Life, and Let It Be
AMEC Hymnal, #292

1. Take my life, and let it be
Con-se-crat-ed, Lord, to Thee.
Take my hands, and let them move
At the im-pulse of Thy Love, At the im-pulse of Thy Love.
2. Take my feet, and let them be
Swift and beau-ti-ful for Thee;
Take my voice and let me sing
Always, on-ly, for my King, Always, on-ly, for my King.
3. Take my lips, and let them be
Filled with mes-sag-es for Thee,
Take my sil-ver and my gold;
Not a mite would I with-hold, Not a mite would I with-hold.
4. Take my love; my God, I pour
At Thy feet its trea-sure-store.
Take my-self, and I will be
Ev-er, on-ly, all for Thee, Ev-er on-ly, All for Thee. A-men.

Alternative Song: *Use Me*, Motor City Mass Choir <https://youtu.be/QoLPkBX-PRk>

Physical space—You may wish to create a dedicated space for your time of devotion. You may choose to place a candle, bible, and special symbols or material/fabric to help you focus and center during this time of reflection and prayer.

If you use this meditation and exercise in a time of family or group devotion, share in the leadership; allow different persons to read or lead different parts of this meditation.



The Christian Education Department will continue to develop resources that can be used as times of personal and collective devotion and study during this pandemic to help us all sustain and strengthen our faith and resolve.