

is already here, it is just that we have to acknowledge that it belongs to God and release it to God's use. That might be our time, our talent or our treasure. It might not seem like much, but when we share what we have with each other... something miraculous does happen. What seems scarce becomes and abundance...more than enough.

Here is the problem we have today in the church culture of America. We love the invitation to come away with Jesus. We need to get away. We get that. We quickly RSVP to that invitation. We love to hear the invitation to come to Jesus with our pain, need, struggles and challenges. That is an invitation we would stand at the mailbox and anticipate for weeks. Yes, that is an invitation we want. However, this last one is one that we might let sit around the house unopened. An invitation to come to each other and share life is something we resist. What will be required of me? Is this really necessary? I know I need Jesus, but do I really need the church? Yet we cannot avoid this reality. An invitation to Jesus is an invitation to share life with each other. The miracle just does not happen without the disciples being involved in this story.

Fred Craddock tells of the time he was invited to preach at the Riverside Church, New York City, where Dr. William Sloane Coffin was the pastor and where the great Harry Emerson Fosdick preached for years. Craddock found the modest apartment where he was to stay just down the street from the church. There was nothing in the refrigerator, but a note on its door said, "If you usually eat breakfast, you can go to the church. We have a breakfast for the homeless people." So Craddock walked down there and stood in line with a large crowd holding metal trays being served in the church basement. He talked to people around him. "Well, what's put you into this situation?" Alcohol. "What put you here?" one of them asked. "I was invited," he said. Church time, he stood before hundreds of people worshipping, enormous choir, great organ, getting goose bumps, and he said to himself, Who am I? I'm a guest ... a guest of Christ, a guest of the church.

You are invited this morning. You are invited to come. Come away with Jesus. You are invited to come. Come to Jesus with your needs. Cast your cares upon him for He cares for you. You are invited to come. Come and share life with God's people. An invitation to Jesus is an invitation to each other.



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Invitations

Matthew 14:13-21

TRINITY PULPIT



If your home is like ours, spring and summer is the season for invitations. Our mailbox is filled through these two seasons with invitations. We have invitations to weddings, graduations, rehearsal dinners, cookouts, birthdays and other gatherings. There is something heart warming about receiving an invitation. It is a reminder that you have been included. It is a reminder that someone wants to be present to an important moment in his or her life. Invitations are a reminder that we do have these special moments in life that we want to share with others. They remind us that not everyday are the same, but some days are different and require a different approach to living.

As I read our text today, I am struck by what I think are three invitations from Jesus. Jesus is always inviting us in the gospels. Jesus was always asking people to come and follow, come and drink, come and eat, come away with me, come and rest, come and take up your cross and come and see. In fact, Jesus first words to those who were seeking him were a simple invitation...come and see.

In this moment in Jesus' life he is experiencing the depth of human emotion. We are told just prior to this passage that John the Baptist has been beheaded. John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin and the one who had baptized Jesus and proclaimed Jesus' coming had found himself in prison for preaching against the King. John had denounced Herod because Herod had taken his brother Phillip's wife Herodias. John proclaimed that this was not right and Herod, we are told, wanted to kill John but was afraid to do so. However, now in prison, John is the victim of a revengeful Herodias. On Herod's birthday Herodias daughter, Salome, danced and pleased Herod that he promised her anything she wanted. She asked for the head of John the Baptist. John is beheaded and the text speaks of the heaviness and sadness of this moment. The passage ends this way "John's

disciples came and got John's body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus."

The very next verse says "When Jesus heard what had happened he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place."

In the midst of incredible grief and pain Jesus withdrew, privately to a solitary place. Notice all the words of longing to be alone and process because just what has happened. John, his cousin, has been viciously killed for no reason except someone's revenge and hatred. Because he had spoken the truth he had died. Because he had proclaimed God's word he had died. There is no rescue; there is no intervention by God in John's story. It is a tragic story of how the powerful can sometimes victimize the powerless and there is no justice and there is no fairness. It is life and when you are on the wrong side of that equation you are left speechless and wondering what has happened. When we go through such moments or we witness such moments we need time to think, to ponder, to pray, to be alone. When Jesus hears this he withdraws, privately to a solitary place.

I think this is our first invitation. It is to come away with me. The truth is Jesus did not withdraw alone, but he withdrew with his disciples. In His solitary place there are those with Him. We know that Jesus often withdrew alone without the disciples to spend time just with God the father in prayer. We have example of example of Jesus moving to quiet places to pray. Even in His last night before His death, Jesus would take the disciples with Him as He withdrew to the Garden of Gethsemane and then of course Jesus would go a little farther in by Himself to pray.

One invitation Jesus gives to us is to come away with Him. We are invited to come to Me and I will give you rest. When we are overwhelmed by life we are invited by Jesus to come to a place of solace.

Jesus invites us to solitude. Now for some of us that sounds wonderful but we think where can I find solitude? I often laugh that I think we ought to provide a place as part of our Wednesday night programming where people can come and be quiet. A place they can come and sleep, meditate, or just be still and know that God is God. There are many of us that long for silence and solitude. We long for a place that is quiet without the demands of work, family and activities.

Yet, some of us also resist such places. We are afraid of the silence. In the silence we know we might hear God, encounter God, and that is the last thing we want. In his wonderful book, Celebration of Discipline, Richard Foster reminds us of the importance of solitude as a Christian practice. It is definitely the practice of Jesus. Our text today is evident of this. Jesus withdrew, privately to a solitary place. Jesus did not fear the quiet and solitude of being alone with God. Neither should we.

In his book on community, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote two chapters on this concept. One of the chapters is entitled "The Day Together." The next chapter is entitled "The Day Alone." Bonhoeffer writes:

Let him who cannot be alone beware of community and let him who is not in community beware of being alone. Each by itself has profound pitfalls and perils. One who wants fellowship without solitude plunges into the void of words and feelings and one who seeks solitude without fellowship perishes in the abyss of vanity self infatuation and despair. (Life Together-Bonhoeffer p.77)

Bonhoeffer goes onto say of Christian silence and solitude it is silence under and before the Word of God. Our silence is not just to rest although we need rest, and it is not just to think upon nothing. It is to sit ourselves before the very presence of God and under the Word of God and to fill our minds with the things of God and not of those pressing matters or urgent matters. Jesus bids us to come and find rest. Take my yoke upon you for mine is easy and light.

Jesus invites you to come away with Him. How long has it been since you withdrew, privately to a solitary place with Jesus? Our souls thirst for such moments and you will be surprised at the renewal you will experience. The first invitation is to come away with Jesus.

There is a second invitation I find here and that's Jesus' invitation to come to me. Jesus seeks solitude but cannot find such a place or a moment. The crowds learn that Jesus is traveling and they travel there as well. When Jesus arrives by boat they had walked around the lake by

foot and are were waiting for Him. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd He had compassion on them and healed their sick. The story continues that as night fell and time was passing, the disciples wanted to send the crowd away so they could find something to eat and yet, Jesus would not send them away hungry and fending for themselves. Instead He told the disciples to feed the people. The disciples, with only five loaves and two fishes, asked how is this possible? Jesus took the small amount of food and blessed it and shared it and there is the miracle of the feeding of 5,000 plus women and children.

I find an invitation to come to Jesus in the phrase "he saw a large crowd and had compassion on them and healed their sick."

Jesus sees a crowd and has compassion on them. Jesus is attempting to get away. Jesus is attempting to be alone and think and pray as the result of John's death. Yet, when He sees the crowd He has compassion on them.

I don't want to make too much of this, but when I read this the words that jumped from the page to me was the difference between crowd and them. In studying the Greek words and phrasing, I wish I could tell you that the difference between the crowd and them was the difference between plural and singular. Yet, it is not. They are both plural words and there might not be that much difference in the language and the writer may have not meant anything, but observation. However, to me there was something about that change from crowd to them.

We can look at a crowd and not notice the faces in the crowd. We can look at a mass of people and the mass of people can lose their identity. In fact, in the word crowd we assume a loss of identity. When we are part of the crowd we are not asserting our own identity. I think there is something here. I think Jesus saw a crowd, but had compassion on them. Yes, all of them but also each of them.

This invitation is the reminder that Jesus notices us. The crowd that day was not just a crowd. It was a crowd filled with individuals with their own sickness, their needs, their struggles and hopes. As one writer puts it:

There are people with brown eyes and people with green eyes. People who have curly hair and people who have straight hair. There are those who are head and shoulder above others and others head and shoulders below others. There are those who are quiet and those who are rowdy. There are rich ones and poor ones. They are all there and they are all welcome.

When Jesus sees the crowd, He does not see the nameless, faceless mass of humanity. He sees us, one by one in need of Him. We are invited to come to Jesus.

Jesus was once walking through a crowd on His way to a house to heal a young girl. It was an urgent moment. He was on His way, His mind was on the request before Him and yet as He moved through the crowd there was a woman with an issue of blood that everyone had given up on. All the physicians and theologians had declared her beyond help and unclean. She thought to herself if she could just touch the cloak of Jesus she would be healed. In that massive and pushing crowd she reached out and touched Jesus. At that moment Jesus stopped. He was on a mission, He had an urgent appointment, but He stopped and asked who touched me. The disciples seemingly laugh at Jesus. Who touched you? Are you kidding in this crowd? Everyone is touching you? How can you ask who touched you? Jesus knew that power had gone out of Him to another and so He asked who touched me. The woman came trembling before Jesus and told Him her story. He responded your faith has made you whole. Go and live without pain and suffering.

She was just a woman in the crowd but she knew, she knew some how she could come to Jesus.

Jesus invites us to come. This story reminds us that Jesus does care for the every day needs of life. Here we find concern for food the basic of life. We find concern for health as He heals those around Him. At the basics of it all is the concern for you and me. When the disciples say send them away to find food, Jesus says they do not need to go away.

Does Jesus want to remind us that God's provision is complete and full? In others words, God is the provider of all good things. We need not only turn to God for spiritual things, but for all things. What ever we might be going through Jesus invites us to share it with Him.

Much more so in those deserted places. Jesus shows compassion on those who find themselves in a remote

and deserted place. Interesting is it not that a deserted place can sometimes be just what we need to gather our thoughts and reset our priorities... but a remote or deserted place that becomes a permanent place can become our prison, our captor, and create a place in our lives where we feel abandoned, alone, helpless and hopeless.

In our deserted and remote place we find Jesus and Jesus does not send us away, but rather invites us to come. The second invitation is an invitation to come to Jesus as we are... hurting, sick, wondering, questioning, doubting, prideful, alone, deserted, abandoned... come.

THE INVITATION TO JESUS IS AN INVITATION TO ONE ANOTHER AND PARTICIPATION IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS GOD'S PEOPLE. GOD HAS PLACED WITHIN US, AS GOD'S PEOPLE, RESOURCES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF ONE ANOTHER AND OF OTHERS. WHAT IS NEEDED IS ALREADY HERE, IT IS JUST THAT WE HAVE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT IT BELONGS TO GOD AND RELEASE IT TO GOD'S USE.

The final invitation I find in our text is that invitation to come to each other. An invitation to come to Jesus is also an invitation to one another. One of the striking parts of this story is that the disciples are included in the miracle of abundance of the food that day. Notice the words of inclusion throughout this story. Jesus gives the small amount of food to the disciples who then distribute them to the 5000. Matthew reminds us that there are 5000 men, but also women and children. That is a statement of inclusion. Everyone is invited to come and everyone is invited to eat and everyone is satisfied.

It has been said that there are three miracles in this story. First, the miracle of a God who cares. The gods of ancient Rome and Greece did not care for the needs of the common person. They were aloof and needed to be appeased. Not the loving God of the Bible who cares and loves humankind. This God is loving, compassionate and generous. That is a miracle. The second miracle was the actual feeding of the 5,000. How that which is scarce becomes abundance in the hands of Jesus. The third miracle it has been said is that the disciples are used to meet the needs of those present.

It is significant that Jesus uses what is already present and also that Jesus instructs the disciples concerning their responsibility "you give them something to eat" and uses them in the sharing of the food.

The invitation to Jesus is an invitation to one another and participation in the kingdom of God as God's people. God has placed within us, as God's people, resources to meet the needs of one another and of others. What is needed
