

Let us pray... God our Creator, true source of wisdom, whom all life flows, plant your word in our hearts today. May your truth take root and may your grace blossom in this place, cracking open the seed of love, where tendrils of hope bloom and grow... Amen.

For many of you... This year has been a lot... Some of you have lost loved ones... Some of you are going through something difficult or are journeying with a loved one who is going through something difficult.

Some of you are in transitions... And all of us are impacted by the heaviness of the world... economic inflation, insecurity, and uncertainty...

Needless to say, there are countless things we encounter daily that we may want to escape from... To find a place away from all the noise, pain, and worry...

Especially when you are grieving or hurting... It is only natural to crave comfort...

To find something to fill in the emptiness...

And this is something that Jesus wholeheartedly understands.

As we heard in our gospel today, Jesus discovered that his good friend John the Baptist was brutally murdered...

A loss that resonated throughout Jesus' body... A shock that was too much to comprehend...

In fact, it was so intense for Jesus, that he withdrew from the crowds...

Deeply mourning, he gets into a boat and goes off by himself to a desolate place...

But his solitude doesn't last very long...

As a large crowd, 5,000 men plus women and children, followed Jesus on foot...

A crowd that was also in mourning, as John the Baptist was a leader to them, and was deeply loved...

In their grief and sorrow, they follow Jesus, gathering in a desolate place where there is no food...

But where they are looking to be fed... Through comfort, compassion, and love...

And Jesus does not disappoint them...

Jesus fills their hunger by showering them with compassion. Through healing the sick and being a loving presence in the midst of all this pain and loss.

Even though it seems that Jesus, himself, may have little in his tank to give, he continues to give...

Leading by example of how we are called to give...

For when the disciples asked Jesus to dismiss the crowd, so that they may go to the towns and buy food...

Jesus' response was... "YOU give them something to eat."

Now I imagine that this was probably the last thing the disciples wanted to hear...

For they too were exhausted, hungry, and in grief... They just wanted to sit down with Jesus, relax, and eat their measly meal of 5 loaves and two fish...

But, instead, Jesus takes their meal, blesses it, and feeds thousands and thousands of people... Providing so much food in fact, that there are still leftovers.

Showing us that even when you have little to give, that a little bit can go a long way...

Even when you are exhausted, grieving, or lost in some desolate place... You have something of value, and there is always someone to feed...

Whether that be through literal food, by providing something here at church so that people can come together through fellowship and conversation...

Or by feeding the young minds of our Sunday School and Confirmation Students by volunteering to teach...

Or showing up at book clubs, adult studies, and worship services... Because when you are present with others, there are many opportunities for you to give of yourself, through compassion and kindness...

Giving what you can of yourself, despite your busy schedules and all that you have going on...

Because you make a difference in the lives of others...

Even in non-related church events... The way that you live and love impacts people in ways beyond comprehension...

Which is why Jesus says... "You give them something to eat."

Because people are hungry... And hungry people will consume whatever is most readily available to them...

And in society today, we have a lot of forces to compete with... Brokenness, jealousy, division, evil, and hatred...

The news and social media.

Of course, not all news is bad, nor is all social media... But it is easy to forgo human interaction much more readily than it was in the past...

Which is why we need Jesus' words... YOU give them something to eat...

Because if you don't, you just never know what they may find...

You are called to give them something to eat because you have a lot to offer...

Even on the days that are hard... When you feel that your tank is close to empty and all you can scrounge up is a measly 5 loaves and 2 fish.

But in reality, what you have, is so much more... Because God is with you, working in the midst of what you have to give...

And what God can do with your 5 loaves and 2 fish is nothing short of a miracle...

For you have God's compassion, love, and goodness flowing through you... Allowing you to truly feed people, filling a hunger that nothing else can satisfy...

Filling a hunger with such fervor that there will still be some love left-over...

Left-over for you to be filled and refilled... Allowing you to continue on for another day...

Because God wants you to be filled... God wants for the whole world to be filled... From desolate places, to places of abundance...

God's presence seeps in them all, where God's blessings are poured out... In you, through you, and for you... Amen.