Happy Monday,

I hope that all you were able to worship on-line over the weekend. The entire worship team is doing such a wonderful job with the move to on-line. If you missed it, please try to attend next weekend.

* **Today, we will have the Monday Bible study class (Matthew) at 3pm on Facebook Live**. All you will need to do is go to my page on Facebook (Scott Engle) and I’ll be there live about 2:50 or so. You will be able to comment and ask questions during the class by using Facebook’s comments -- so long as you have a Facebook account. You don’t need a Facebook account to view the Facebook Live events, but you won’t be able to comment. Just go to facebook.com and search for the church or for me (or anyone else for that matter!). If you have joys or concerns you’d like to lift up in our Monday class, please email those to Patti at pattiengle@tx.rr.com.
* **Tomorrow, the Tuesday class (Genesis) will also be on Facebook Live at 11:45**. I’ll be there about 11:35 or so. Once you are on the page, you’ll see the live feed. You will be able to comment and ask questions during the class. If you have joys or concerns you’d like to lift up in our Tuesday class, please email those to Patti at pattiengle@tx.rr.com.

There are a lot of stories of sharing and helping in this time, and we at St. Andrew have started up a [Helping Hands ministry to aid those who need it](https://www.standrewumc.org/covid_19-helping-hands). Here is a Gospel story about sharing.

**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. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. 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.” Jesus said to them, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” They replied, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” And he said, “Bring them here to me.” 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. 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. *Matthew 14:13-21***

It isn’t hard to understand why children like this story. It is simple and easy to visualize. A huge and hungry crowd is gathered on a Galilean hillside. Having only five loaves of bread and two fish, Jesus blesses and miraculously multiplies the food so it is sufficient to feed perhaps 20,000 people with food left over! (Note – though the story is often referred to as the “feeding of the five thousand,” the figure refers only to the men in the crowd, so 20,000 is a reasonable estimate.)

But children are not the only ones to have treasured this story. Of all the miracles recounted in the gospels, this is the only miracle that appears in all four gospels. In fact, there are two more accounts of Jesus miraculously feeding thousands. As we’d expect, each gospel writer tells the story a little differently. John tells us that a boy brought forward the few loaves and fishes. More than the others, John’s telling of the meal evokes memories of the Exodus and of Jesus’ last meal with his disciples. Mark has more detail and emphasizes Jesus’ compassion. More explicitly than the others, Luke ties together the disciples’ mission to build the kingdom and the power of Jesus’ work with the crowds. This is how it is with the gospel accounts. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John may all work with the same material, but each use it to paint a distinctive portrait of Jesus.

*Matthew’s story*

So, what is the attraction of this particular miracle? Why, of all the miracles Jesus performed during his public ministry, is this the only one preserved by all the gospel writers? Yes, it is spectacular, but no more so than Jesus’ resuscitation of Lazarus after he had been dead four days. There were other large crowds that witnessed Jesus’ miracles, though probably few as large as 20,000. Perhaps Matthew’s simple account will help us understand the significance to the gospel writers of this particular story.

After the execution of his cousin John, Jesus goes off to be alone, even resorting to the use of a boat. But, of course, the crowds track him down and gather around him as soon as he sets foot on shore. Jesus is not upset with the crowds who press in on him; rather, he has compassion for them and cures their sick. Late in the day, the disciples come to Jesus, pointing out that they are out in the middle of nowhere and it is time for everyone to head off and find something to eat in the nearby villages. But Jesus says no; everyone can stay. Though only five loaves of bread and two fish can be found, Jesus looks to heaven, blesses the food, hands it to his disciples . . . *and Jesus is not referred to again in this story*. Perhaps the significance of this miracle story lies here.

It is Jesus who takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and multiplies it . . . but it is the disciples who actually distribute the food, feed the crowds, and collect the leftovers. Jesus is the power behind the feeding, but the disciples are the ones who do the work. Jesus *doesn’t* wave a magic wand over the crowd so that food might appear in everyone’s lap or so that the hungry tummies will be magically full. This is why the miraculous feeding is in all four gospels . . . the entire miracle story is a metaphor for how Jesus will work. Jesus’ work will be done by others, during his ministry and after his death. Jesus is teaching his disciples what his ministry is all about. He doesn’t just tell them, he shows them. The work of building God’s kingdom will be done through the disciples, then and now.

*Sharing the miracle*

From God’s choosing of Abraham to the feeding of the thousands to the Storehouse, it has always been this way. God is not a god-of-the-magic-wand. God’s purposes are worked out through us, not despite us. Jesus reminds his disciples that *they* are to be the light of the world. He sends *them* out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick (Luke 9:2). He shows his disciples how this works by handing them the loaves and having them distribute the food. If the crowds are going to get fed, the disciples are going to have to do it. They can’t sit around hoping and praying that Jesus will do it for them. The disciples know whose power is at work, but they are also learning that their own hands better get busy.

Why is it this way? Why doesn’t God simply wave a wand? *Because* God is love and we have been created so that we might love God and one another. This love is not mere sentiment or feeling, this love is carried in our compassion, our caring, our service, and our sacrifice. Just as Jesus’ disciples learned what love is on that late afternoon, even in this Time of Virus, perhaps especially so, we will learn much about what love really is.

*A link to check out*

[This is a thoughtful piece on living in the light of Christ](https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/03/18/what-does-it-mean-live-light-amid-coronavirus-fears), even in the midst of the present darkness.

*Movie recommendation*

Last night, Patti and I watched Clint Eastwood’s 2019 film, *Richard Jewell*. We both thought it was excellent. It was $5.99 on Amazon Video.

*Book Recommendation*

*Simply Jesus* is a good place to start with N. T. Wright. But it is only a start -- the man is one prolific writer. You’ll probably get a couple more Wright recommendations over the course of this shutdown.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott