

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

DELIVERING LEFTOVERS

Matthew 14:13-21

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Analysis by Michael Hoy

13Now when Jesus heard [about the beheading of John the Baptist], 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. 14When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. 15When 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.' 16Jesus said to them, 'They need not go away; you give them something to eat.' 17They replied, 'We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.' 18And he said, 'Bring them here to me.' 19Then 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. 20And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. 21And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

DIAGNOSIS: Deserted: Nothing Left

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Deserted Place*

Sometimes we seek to escape the madness of this world. Herod had John beheaded (Matt. 14:1-12), but soon enough the disciples

would find themselves in troubled waters again (Matt. 14:22-33). There's no real place to hide from it all—though we certainly try. A deserted place is where Jesus goes; and no doubt the disciples would see the deserted place as a reasonable choice—but not for Jesus' reason. That's why, to the disciples, the crowd that follows Jesus to this place will seem only a nuisance.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Deserting Hearts*

If we're going to enjoy this, the disciples think, we need to get rid of all the crowds. Their hearts desert the ones who have come: "Send them away; let them buy food for themselves." Jesus offers another alternative: "You give them something to eat." But the disciples are only able to see a bare refrigerator and cupboards. "We have nothing here_." Oh sure, they grasp what they can with five loaves and two fish, but still they have no sense that even in this is a blessing of undeserved gift. Not only have they deserted the crowd, they have deserted the sense (trust) that all good things are a blessing from God. They reason that it can't make a meal for the thousands gathered; and again they ignore Jesus' reason, Jesus' heart.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Deserted by God*

The deserters of God, humanity, and creation are without fear, without trust; they are downward spiraling. How much more can a place be deserted than it already is with all the disciples deserting the crowd heart and hand? But God hasn't had a turn. And God's presence, not his absence, can create a desert silence that is deafening, even deadly. Even the disciples hint at this when they say "the hour is now late." They have their own reason for saying this; but God knows that it is "late" for the disciples for other reasons.

PROGNOSIS: Delivered: Plenty Left Over

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Delivered by Grace and Blessing in Jesus*

How late the hour will be when Jesus, on the cross, will himself be the offering, the feast, and the provider of all blessings! And for whom? All who are in the desert, even and especially all who are deserted or deserters. In the lateness of this hour, on this evening, Jesus hosts the Meal. The blessing and brokenness of the loaves (like the blessing and brokenness of his body) is given to all: "All ate and were filled." None are excluded. No one is deserted. That was Jesus' reason for choosing this deserted place in this late hour.

Step 5: Advance Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Delivered Hearts*

Then the disciples "took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full." After all their loaf and fish counting, they could not help but note the delightful irony that they now held in their hands a basket apiece. Holding the blessings of the Host so close cannot help but reach into their hearts with overflowing blessing. Look how many leftovers we have!, they must have thought. Our baskets are overflowing with love! Faith is replenished, and their/our own reason gives way to the saving-reason of all this wonderful feasting.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Making Deliveries*

And notice how, when Jesus' delivers the disciples from their fear of earthly (and divine!) scarcity, he gives the joy of the feast "to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds." All five thousand-plus of the crowd receive from the hands of Jesus' own disciples—those same disciples who would later desert Jesus (Matt. 26:56), but even then would be delivered by his authority over any and all obstacles of desertion (Matt. 28:16-20). It's kind of Matthew to mention also the women and children, along with the sick who are cured. We

should accent these and a so many others who find themselves on the lower strata of social life. Any and all who have known the pain of desertion in their lives, To them we say (with Jesus): You are welcome! You are included in this feast! Y'all come! That is the Word they need to hear. Guess who's making the deliveries to their door? Once you figure it out, bet you'll be smiling.