

All Who Ate  
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First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha  
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**Isaiah 55:1-5**

<sup>1</sup> Ho, everyone who thirsts,  
come to the waters;  
and you that have no money,  
come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
without money and without price.  
<sup>2</sup> Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,  
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?  
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,  
and delight yourselves in rich food.  
<sup>3</sup> Incline your ear, and come to me;  
listen, so that you may live.  
I will make with you an everlasting covenant,  
my steadfast, sure love for David.  
<sup>4</sup> See, I made him a witness to the peoples,  
a leader and commander for the peoples.  
<sup>5</sup> See, you shall call nations that you do not know,  
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,  
because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,  
for he has glorified you.

**Matthew 14:13-21**

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

I must admit I have mission trip on the brain. Two weeks ago, our young women helped with a summer program for kids, prepared, packed, and delivered meals to people in low-income and subsidized housing from donated food from Trader Joe's, and worked on home improvements for two different homeowners. This past week, I worked on home improvements with Jim. There was an odd and out-of-the-ordinary thread tying almost all of these mission projects together.

At the summer program, the young staff members were not welcoming of the volunteers which included some of our kids and did not work to help them find ways to contribute in the program's routines. At one home improvement site in St. Louis, work was being done on the home of a man who was a regular at the senior center coordinating our work. When we arrived at his home, we learned that the man, who we knew had been hospitalized, had just been removed from life support. On our second and final day at that site we learned he had passed away. With so much going on, we did not interact with the family except to use the bathroom. When we found that they did not have all the supplies we needed to do the work they requested, as was required, we purchased the needed materials. At the other home improvement site, when the woman who lived there saw that her crew consisted of two women and five girls, she asked with disappointment if there weren't any boys with them. While the girls tackled the project with great energy and success, they began their first day on site also without the needed tools, and used plastic spoons and rolling pizza cutters to remove wallpaper in the kitchen and bathroom so they could paint the rooms as requested.

This past week, not only did our crew find that we did not have nearly enough supplies for everyone to work, prompting four separate trips to Lowe's, but the homeowners never spoke to us even though they regularly came and went from their home. There were no words of thanks, nor any acknowledgement of the hard work put in during hot days in the sun.

Now you may have figured out that the thread I speak of involves thankless and frustrating projects and you would be correct. These stories kept coming to mind as I read and re-read Isaiah. "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!...See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you." Everyone we served was thirsty, was without money. And we were strangers whom they summoned by asking for help from our service partners; to these people we did not know we ran because of God who glorified them. Certainly there are times when we are the ones being served – we are all poor in some way, we all thirst in some way – but today serving others is in the front of my mind.

For neither trip did we serve for the thanks – we served because it was the right thing to do, because God called us to serve. I'd even say we did it because we were following Christ's example. Our reading from Matthew is one of the "feeding of the multitude" stories found in the gospels. Crowds followed Jesus and, even though he had wanted to be off on his own for a while, he cured their sick and then he fed them because they did not have anything to eat. Most times we hear this story we get caught up in the story of the loaves and fish, yet my attention is always grabbed by the fact that Jesus had gone away to a deserted place by himself. The reading begins with "Now when Jesus heard this he withdrew

from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself” but we don’t get clued in to what he had just heard. Looking back a little in Matthew, we find that Jesus had withdrawn after he learned that John the Baptist had been killed by Herod.

The kids with whom I spent the last two weeks had worries on their minds, some small and some larger than what a young person should ever have to carry. Yet that did not stop them from having compassion for others. The kids were frustrated because they had to spend time sitting around instead of working. Yet that did not stop them from having compassion for others. The kids were hurt because the people to whom they were showing kindness did not acknowledge their kindness. Yet that did not stop them from having compassion for others. Our kids were pretty remarkable. And I think they were tremendous examples for us all. They worked hard. They did the impossible – I mean, removing wallpaper, successfully, with a plastic spoon and a rolling pizza cutter?? – because they were determined to serve.

We read that, once Jesus had blessed and broken the loaves, he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds, and all ate and were filled. The disciples gave what Jesus had given them and those who received from them were filled. Before that, though, they told Jesus, “We have nothing here, we don’t have enough to give them what they need.” Then Jesus gave to them what seemed so small and they were able to give with an abundance to spare. How often do we despair that we do not have enough to give or do we look at something and deem it impossible?

God has an abundance to give to those who need. When we read in Isaiah that Israel shall call nations that they do not know, and nations that do not know them shall run to them, we are reading words of encouragement to an exiled people, this time exiled in Babylon. They are being assured with words suggesting they will become a great nation where people flock to them in trade and bow down to them, just what a people who have nothing, who are nothing, would desire: to be restored. It may not be quite the same as people going on a mission trip but weren’t we sent to a people who have been laid low, to a people deserving to be uplifted because they are God’s, by a God who has compassion? When we met those people what we brought, in terms of supplies and maybe in terms of ourselves, didn’t seem to be enough but what we found was that God provided so that we could give and give above and beyond what we thought we had to give.

There are people who are thirsty, people who have no money to buy the things they need, even people who spend the money they have on things which do not meet their needs. To all of them God sends us through God’s compassion for them. And where we think we could not possibly serve them, God provides if we only try. And when we try, all who receive can be filled, many times in ways we cannot know or perceive. Go, try, serve. So may it be for you and for me.

Let us pray: God, you are the one who provides the abundance. Let us offer what we have so you might offer an abundance to others through us, we pray. Amen.