

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
July 22, 2018
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2 Samuel 7:1-14a
Psalm 89:20-37
Ephesians 2:11-22
Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

You Are Enough

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³² And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴ As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. ⁵⁴ When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, ⁵⁵ and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the market-places, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

If today's Gospel reading has left you feeling confused, don't be concerned—you're not alone. We seem to come into the middle of a narrative, then to jump ahead; Jesus and his apostles are talking, and they get out of a boat, and then he's teaching, and then they're mooring the boat...wait, what?

We've been hit with the double whammy of Mark's tendency toward choppiness in his Gospel and the occasional quirkiness of the lectionary selections. We have to go back to verses 7-13—before the horrific story of the death of John the Baptist that we heard last week—to find the thread of our narrative. In those verses, Jesus sends the apostles out two by two to carry on the work he has started: to heal, to teach, to spread the good news of the Kingdom of God. So we see them today gathering around him upon their return, eager to tell him of their experiences. They try to find private time for this, but the crowds find Jesus and press upon him and his followers, even after they row off in a boat to a deserted place.

At the end of our reading, the same thing repeats. Jesus and his apostles have gone off in the boat again, but as soon as they land on the shore, the crowds begin to rush in, carrying their ailing ones and begging for healing. The reason for the disconnect is that the lectionary skips two significant and familiar stories: the feeding of the five thousand and Jesus' walking on the water. We seem to have lots of connective tissue, but not much meat.

Nevertheless, I think we can take two messages from this text, if we apply our understanding of the total narrative and use a little imagination. First, it is our duty, our obligation as members of the church, to take up the commission that Jesus gave to his apostles. The passage from the letter to the Ephesians emphasizes this point, that we have become full members of the household of God, “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.”

So it is up to us to do the things that God would have us do. And the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, tell us explicitly, again and again, what those things are. We are the prophets. We are the apostles. We are the shepherds. We are to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, care for the sick, visit the lonely. We are to care for orphans and widows. We are to protect the weak, the elderly, those who are outcasts, those who are refugees. We are to practice the radical hospitality of welcoming strangers and aliens. We are to spread the Good News to all people and, as we will do today, welcome new members into the household of God through the sacrament of Holy Baptism.

Some preachers would use today’s passage as a reminder that we need to allow ourselves rest, to have sabbath time for reflection and prayer. And indeed it is vital for each of us as individuals to do that, to take time to refresh ourselves alone with God. But as a body—as THE body of Christ—the church has no time for rest. We live in a world beset by too many ills—disease, hunger, poverty, homelessness, floods, wildfires, volcanic eruptions, storms, rising sea levels—to let up on our efforts as the hands and feet of God on earth. And our world is beset by too many evils—hatred, bigotry, oppression, terrorism, war, genocide—to let up on our efforts to spread the love of God and the peace of God’s Kingdom.

So that’s our first message: God calls us to act in a world filled with need.

And the second message? Here’s where we can apply a little Biblical background knowledge and some imagination. What’s the typical first reaction in Scripture when God calls someone to do God’s work? What does Moses say when God calls him to lead the Israelites out of enslavement in Egypt? “I can’t speak well enough to do that.” What does Amos say when God calls him to prophesy to the people of Israel? “I’m not a prophet—I’m a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees.” If we put ourselves in the sandals of the apostles, what might we imagine them saying when Jesus tells them to go into the countryside to preach his message and emulate his deeds? “We’re only fishermen—how can we heal the sick and cast out demons?” Again and again, we hear the refrain, “I cannot—I lack what is needed.” Those who are called say they don’t have enough eloquence, enough influence, enough skill. So it’s easy for me to picture the apostles coming back to Jesus, in the first sentence of our passage from Mark, filled with excitement—because they did it! They healed the sick! They cast out demons! And yet, a few verses later (if the lectionary hadn’t skipped them), what do we hear them say? When Jesus tells them to feed those who have gathered around him, they respond that they don’t have enough. Not enough food, not enough creativity, not enough faith. And Jesus proves to them what they indeed can do, with God’s help.

So this seems to be a lesson that the apostles, like the prophets and patriarchs before them, have to learn over and over: that they are enough. There’s an Internet meme I see from time to time, one of those affirmations aimed at encouraging those who are feeling inadequate or overwhelmed. It says simply, “You are enough.” And I saw a comment on it that was almost an attack—a brief rant that no one is enough without God’s help. I thought, “How rude!” And then I

thought, “Well, duh. Of course we need God to help us. But we are enough, as long as we are in God’s hands.”

And that’s the second message of today’s readings: that, with God’s help, we have enough. We ARE enough. The loaves and fishes are enough to feed everyone. The widow’s two small coins are enough to fill the treasury. The apostles are enough to spread the Word, to teach, to heal. They are enough, in the end, to become the foundation of God’s church.

And what about us? There’s a handy study guide to Mark’s Gospel, published by Forward Movement, called *Embodying Mark*. Author Meda Stamper, a Presbyterian pastor with a Ph.D. in New Testament studies, puts it this way:

We do not have enough for what we are called to do, but [Jesus] does. It isn’t about what we have at all. It is about who Jesus is and what he can do with what we bring...He makes what we have be enough for whatever he wants us to do. It may not feel like enough. We may not feel up to it, but if it is a task he has given us to do, then he will make it enough with more to spare.

Isn’t that a powerful message? We are enough, we have enough, because God will take what we bring and make it so. In practical terms, your box of food in the red wagon can be enough to feed someone. The greeting you give to a stranger in the Narthex can be enough to help her find a church home. The Comfort Kit you hand to a homeless man can be enough to help him through the day. Your knowledge of the Old Testament can be enough to help Sunday school students understand the lesson. Your pledge today to support Riley Evelyn can be enough to help her on her journey of faith.

We are enough. We have Emmanuel, God with us, and so we will always be enough.