

Something from Nothing
Feeding the 5,000
TCC
October 14, 2018

This story is in all four gospels. It is a highly valued lesson, we can infer. We can only focus today on a couple of really important elements; slow it down to a couple of key points. One is the subject of nothingness. Nothingness is too little discussed in our faith (synonymous with emptiness). In the Buddhist faith nothingness is powerful. Let me read you a quote on nothingness:

Nothingness is a silent mind. The absence of thoughts, beliefs, ideas and concepts. **Zen** is not a learning and acquiring of something but a letting go of...an unlearning. The word is "sunyata" in Sanskrit, which is literally "zero-ness". Without getting too deep into the weeds here, let me just propose for this particular situation that Jesus was attuned to "zero-ness." Jesus understood a quiet mind; he cultivated it. Jesus was so closely identified with God's thoughts, he was in a constant state of creation. Remember Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. Nothingness, or pretty close to it...except for the Spirit of God, alpha and omega, the beginning and the end (which we also call Jesus). What could be possible with nothingness of this sort? Everything. Anything. The "endpoint" of creation; the spark that gives way to the beginning of something.

This is where we find ourselves with Jesus and the disciples. This was a situation here. Everyone is tired. Everyone is hungry. There are no McDonald's or Dunkin stores nearby. "Send them away," is the disciples' answer. (That would have been mine.) After all, they have almost nothing. Teaching moment. Jesus says in true leadership style: *You give them something to eat.* Ridiculous, say the disciples. Impossible. The Lord definitely needs rest. Big time. Jesus is unhinged. Or is Jesus familiar with the power of nothing? It is the endpoint of creation. *Do you and I get it?* When we have nothing or very little, isn't it easy to panic? Isn't it easy to be afraid, very afraid? Oh, yes. You must have learned at some point in your life there's a word in Chinese that is both "crisis" and "opportunity." That's where they were on the hillside with Jesus. When we have almost nothing we get creative. When we have almost nothing, we go outside the dots; we are willing to change. We are open to new ideas. Nothing is not knowing. Nothing is letting God in, becoming of full of God, instead of full of something else. :)

The next thing I wish to point out this morning is the word *compassion*. Is there power in compassion? I'm wondering today. I have seen very tough cookies crumble pretty dramatically when they are shown compassion. I have seen and heard and experienced situations where compassion gives way to solutions.

Compassion starts a fire of hope and the winds of blessing. Compassion is knowing that what is *underneath* someone's distress, that what is below the surface of toughness or defiance or even rudeness, there is a cry for compassion. Compassion is the miracle of seeing "other" as you. So there's nothingness and there's connection, which is synonymous with compassion.

Next we have thanksgiving. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 "Be grateful in all circumstances." Do you think that is just so that we can be considered "good?" I don't think so. I think these are the keys to the kingdom here. There is something powerful and magnetic about giving thanks in all situations, even hard ones. Jesus of course knew this, and he demonstrated it in order to share the wealth of his knowledge. Many of you know this powerful tool; I have heard you say in the midst of great sorrow what you are thankful for. But we can all use the reminder: *In times of need and confusion, give thanks.* We don't know the outcome; we don't know the timing. We just know that to live in gratitude is to live abundantly. I'm here to suggest this morning that to live in gratitude is to CREATE abundance with God. Jesus knew this. He demonstrated it here in our story.

And the last thing I'd like to lift up today with you is the most important idea and that is the idea of faith that all is well. All is well. Let's say that. All is well. Does that mean there are no challenges? Oh no. Does that mean there is no loss, no suffering? Absolutely not. We have situations in our lives that mirror the one with Jesus and the disciples on the hill. The difference is we lack faith, we don't practice with regularity compassion, and we are unaware of the power of nothingness, the power of letting go. Jesus embraced the void. He had compassion for those around them. And he had faith that a miracle could occur. And it did.

Let's you and I think about what needs "fixing" in our lives. We could start right here in our church. You could start right here in your own life. Let go of everything to get to nothing. Be open to something new that God might have to say. Have compassion for yourself and all those related to your situation. Give thanks for the goodness of God. And have faith. See what happens.