

2021 July 25 Rev. Sara M. Holland Sermon

Scripture: 2nd Kings 4:42-44, John - feeding the 5000

Title: “Make The People Sit Down”

Theme: 9th Sunday after Pentecost, God’s Abundant Presence

Introduction

We read this text from the gospel of John and we might immediately notice that it is not only a miracle through the work of Jesus’ hands that saves the day - the boy who had the food, in a sense, is a hero. I love that there is a child present, and really has as much agency and part in this miracle as the disciples do. But before anyone can have their literal or spiritual food -- Jesus says, “Make the people sit down.”

Our lives are full of metaphoric standing up, milling around. Of course, we might have signs that we are standing and moving even when Jesus has invited us to ‘sit down’ or become a part of miracles.

A writer, Cylon George gave me some reminders about how we might know if we should metaphorically ‘sit down.’¹

¹Cylon George, “15 Signs You Are Too Busy and Need to Take a Break,” updated June 1, 2021 <https://www.lifehack.org/articles/work/15-signs-you-are-too-busy-and-should-stop.html>.

They provide a list of ways we can know if we are too busy and therefore not tending to ourselves and other parts of life; for example, our faith or family.

One sign for us might be that we are always trying to meet the expectations of the people around us rather than our own. Even though you know you have a great head on your shoulders if you find yourself exceedingly critical of a project you complete, a chore you finished or a meal you cooked. Nothing ever seems good enough.

Another sign for us that we might need to 'sit down' as Jesus requested the people of the first century to do is if we feel as though we are failing in multiple areas of our life. Imagine, if we felt as though we were failing and we simply decided to just take a break, take a mental health day. Whether it is our family or our work place - what if we just took a day and focused on ourselves.

One final sign that we need to take Jesus' call to 'sit down' quite seriously is if we are paralyzed when it comes to making decisions. If we are paralyzed when it comes to making decisions it means that we are struggling to tune into what we want, need or how we might visualize any given choice and outcome we have.

“Make the people sit down,” Jesus says. Have we been listening to the calls to sit down in our life? Are we hearing the requests of people we love as well as those of God?

We have a couple of really interesting comparisons to make this morning. First, we might immediately be intrigued by the similarities between the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament text as well as the gospel reading. Many of us who have grown up in the Christian church often forget that a good deal of the stories, parables and lessons in the gospel and New Testament are retold versions of that which came before - the Hebrew scriptures. In the 2nd Kings text we hear of a man who has food in his sack and Elisha commands the food be given to the people. The secondary character in this story questions how much food is available much like Philip does in the gospel reading. In both stories, even in the face of doubt, God’s abundant presence is revealed.

-pause-

So maybe you are one of us who is prone to always wanting to meet others’ expectations or if you are feeling like you are failing in multiple areas of your life it is possible that by the world’s standards you are succeeding even if you don’t feel that way.

But when Jesus commands us to ‘sit down,’ we might find that success matters a lot less and the emotions related to success or failure begin to matter more. We might find that we see the spiritual food available to us if we are able to pause and catch glimpses of the miracles all around.

I love that this gospel text gives us two quick examples of miracles.

Not only do we hear how Jesus, the boy and the disciples feed the 5000, we hear in verses 15 - 20 that Jesus is walking on the water. The disciples are so astonished that Jesus feels the need to offer words of comfort. “It’s me,” Jesus says.

“Sit down.” This is our great call to patience, rest and belief this weekend.

Furthermore, perhaps your call this weekend is to serve as the child or the disciple in the story - perhaps you are meant to be part of the miracle, too.

Theologian Karen Marie Yust declares that this gospel reading shows us that, “Ministry is about multiplying resources so that what might have been a social handout becomes a revelation of amazing grace. Ministry should leave people exclaiming that prophets of transformation are active in the world, bringing hope to souls weary of oppressive social systems and values.”²

When we ‘sit down,’ we can see the gospel’s amazing grace that Karen Marie Yust mentions and we can imagine the ways that we might become a part of this. *6 mins, 35 seconds*

You might be thinking that using Karen Marie Yust’s proclamation here I am only talking about the social actions that many churches take to house, feed and respond to the needs of community members. Sure, that is part of how this miraculous grace moves in the world but I want to get us to that personal piece, which is about our one on one relations with each other.

²Karen Marie Yust, “Pastoral Perspective on John 6: 1-21,” in *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 3*, ed. by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 286.

And this personal response to the gospel does not require money but radical connection and care for those we encounter. In a personal response to this reading we might be led to 'sit down,' receive God's abundant presence and offer a form of listening and reception that we had not before. We might be able to see a part of a person we had not seen before. It is possible you are thinking - "Okay, Sara so, practically, how am I supposed to do that?" Here are a couple of suggestions on how to 'sit down' with others:

-do so with no cell phone

-do not listen with how to respond

-seek to really understand the person you are speaking to

These 3 simple starting places can truly impact the manner in which we 'sit down' with others. When we 'sit down' with radical acceptance, patience and love we will change the world. No cell phone, open listening (withhold formulating a response) and seeking to understand the person you are speaking to. If we take these practical steps in our sitting with others we'll be making space for miraculous relationships.

After Jesus gives thanks, distributes the loaves, fishes and everyone eats (as much as they want) -- Jesus tells them in verse 12b: "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." Now before we go and start thinking of Jesus as an extreme miser, let's consider how often Jesus speaks metaphorically.

When Jesus says this about the loaves and fishes, he is indeed referring to the physical abundance which remains of the miracle, but from my interpretation this is also about the wisdom that exists in the world and how we each need to be aware that there is always more wisdom and grace. Jesus says: "So that nothing may be lost."

We are going to try and 'sit down,' so that nothing of ourselves may be lost.

We are going to try and 'sit down,' so that nothing of our neighbors will be lost, even those with whom we do not agree.

We are going to 'sit down,' so that we can receive God's miraculous grace and so that we will be able to offer this to the world.

And so, today, I pray that this will be so.

Please join us in singing hymn number 423 in the New Century Hymnal:
"Great is Your Faithfulness."

Bibliography

- George, Cylon. "15 Signs You Are Too Busy and Need to Take a Break." June 1, 2021.
<https://www.lifhack.org/articles/work/15-signs-you-are-too-busy-and-should-stop.html>.
- Yust, Karen Marie. "Pastoral Perspective on John 6: 1-21." In *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 3*, edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, 286.
Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.