

“TWO WAYS OF SEEING”  
Karen F. Bunnell  
Elkton United Methodist Church  
August 6, 2017

Matthew 14:13-21

Jesus was tired and sad. When today’s Gospel lesson opens, Jesus is tired and sad. What we didn’t hear, but what happened just before the start of today’s lesson, was that one of Jesus’ closest relatives and friends, John the Baptist, had been brutally murdered at the hands of Herod, for no fault of his own, save the fact that he had criticized Herod and Herod’s wife wanted him gone. It was a tragedy of epic proportions, and especially so for Jesus.

So when today’s lesson starts, Jesus has just heard the news of John’s terrible death, and he is devastated. Thus we hear, in the very first words of the passage, “he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself.”

You have to remember how important John was to him. Sure, he was his cousin, but he was also the one who came before Jesus to announce his coming, he called people to prepare their hearts for him, and then, he was the one who baptized Jesus in the waters of the River Jordan – a pivotal moment in Jesus’ life and ministry.

So thank goodness Jesus took some time away by himself to grieve this great loss in his life. I would imagine he spent much time in prayer, and probably much time in tears over such a loss. I’m so glad he was able to do that, to be by himself and feel what he was feeling.

But, as was the case so often, the crowds got wind of where Jesus was, and grieving or not, needing privacy or not, they took off in a shot to get to him. And so they did – thousands of them. They needed him, they wanted him and they stopped at nothing to get to him.

Well, any normal human being might have resented that, or might have even asked to be left alone – but not Jesus. He got up off of his knees, wiped his tears, and began to care for all of them. The scripture says that “he had compassion on them and cured the sick.” Apparently it went on for a long time – all day long – and suddenly Jesus looks up and it’s dinner time, and the thousands of people are still camped out all around him on the hill.

The disciples noticed the time as well, and I would imagine, they probably noticed the fatigue on their Master’s face too. So they turned to him and reminded

him that it was dinner time, and that perhaps he should send the crowds home to find food for themselves. Not only were they concerned about Jesus, but they could see plain as day that there was no way to feed all these people. They hadn't come prepared to feed anybody – and they had no idea when the day started that it would become a veritable convention on a hillside. So looking out on a sea of people - the scripture says there were five thousand men, and that didn't include the women and children – so there could have been upwards of ten thousand people! No food and ten thousand hungry people – it doesn't take a rocket scientist to see what needed to be done. The disciples knew there was no way to feed them!

"You feed them." You feed them? The disciples could see no possible way to get that done. But – Jesus did.

You see, there were two ways of seeing what was going on that day.

The disciples: It can't be done. Jesus: It can.

The disciples: It doesn't make sense. Jesus: It doesn't have to make sense. It can be done.

The disciples: practical, looking at the facts. Jesus: Faith-filled, looking at God.

Two ways of seeing. Friends, it matters a lot in life how you see things. In the words of an old familiar phrase, are you a glass half-full or a glass half-empty person? Are you a person who insists on being able to prove things by facts, or can you go out on a limb and have faith? It matters a lot.

I read a great story a long time ago about two shoe salesmen who were sent to a remote country to open up a new market there. Three days after their arrival, the first salesman sent a cablegram that read: "Returning home on next plane. Can't possibly sell shoes here. Everybody goes barefoot!"

Nothing was heard from the second salesman for about two weeks. Then came a big, fat airmail envelope with this message for the home office: "Fifty orders enclosed! Many more to come! Prospects unlimited! Great opportunity! Nobody here has shoes!" (James W. Moore, *There's a Hole in Your Soul Only God Can Fill*, p. 133)

Two ways of seeing! Impossible or possible. "I give up" or "I see what might happen!" Friends, clearly from this passage of scripture today, we learn that Jesus is calling us as his faithful disciples to be people of faith, trust and hope. People who see what might happen even in the face of evidence to the contrary. People

who dream dreams and see visions. People who trust God enough to let themselves be used to tackle seemingly impossible situations and let God do the rest.

I think Jesus wants us to have Godly vision in all things, especially those things that seem impossible or insurmountable. Over and over again, throughout the entire Bible, we see impossible things come true, insurmountable things conquered. When the Hebrews wandered in the wilderness and were starving, and ready to call it a day and give up, God sent manna in abundance. Here, when thousands were hungry, God made enough food appear and did you hear it? There were twelve baskets full left over!

When a sinner by the name of Saul would have continued to run rampant and do his level best to eliminate the early Christian movement, God poured love and grace into his life in such a way that he became the greatest evangelist Christianity has ever known. Everybody who knew Saul before he became Paul would have told you you were crazy if you told them that would happen. There was no way – and yet, God made a way.

And most profoundly of all, in the face of a sin-sick world, a world filled with people who over and over again turned away from God and toward evil, God sent his only begotten Son into the world that the world might be saved. Impossible? Maybe it looked that way, but God made it happen – and the world has never been the same.

Godly vision – in the face of the negative, in the face of struggle, in the face of impossibility – we are called to have godly vision – and trust that God can make a way, and then let him use us in helping to make things happen.

You know, the great “Helen Keller, the blind and deaf woman who made history by learning to overcome her disabilities, was once asked if there was anything worse than being blind. She answered, ‘Oh yes! There is something worse than being blind. It is being able to see and not having any vision!’” (Tony Campolo, *Let Me Tell You a Story*, p. 69)

My friends, you and I as children of God and disciples of Christ, are called to be people of vision – to have vision – to see the way Christ sees – to see possibilities even in the face of seemingly impossible situations. We can do that by remembering our story – our stories – how God has done that in the past for all of his people. We can do that as well by remembering how God has done it in our own lives. Surely there was a time when you faced something hard, something seemingly insurmountable, yet God made a way and you came out on the other side.

Friends, more than just being called to have vision, I want to say to you this morning that the world **needs us** to have vision, because we live in a pretty cynical

world. We live in a world that lives by facts and figures. We live in a world where negative news seems to fill the airwaves and it's really, really easy to jump on that negative, "it can't be done" bandwagon. People need us to show them something different. They need us to witness to God's power and possibilities. They need us to keep our heads up, our chins up, our spirits up. They need us to say and show by our lives that good things can and do happen, and it's because of God.

You and I have a choice. We can choose to be negative and cynical and doubting, or we can choose to be positive, and trust that God can make a way through anything. My prayer is that this story today will remind us that if Christ could feed thousands of people on a hillside with no resources, if he could change the heart of an evildoer like Saul – then anything, anything is possible. And my prayer is that when you come forward for holy communion this morning, the bread and the cup will remind you of perhaps the greatest impossibility ever that was conquered – life after death. Friends, if God could raise Jesus from death, is there anything he cannot do? No.

So if you have come here today and you're facing something hard, something out of which you cannot see a way, something that it doesn't seem can be fixed, I invite you to step out and be a person of vision. Give it to God, and trust that he can and will make a way. You can't see it now, but he can make a way.

He saved a fallen world through Jesus, and if he can do that, than nothing is impossible – not just for the world, but for you and for me. Trust that, and go forth into the world and live like you believe it! May it be so.

Amen.