

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

August 3, 2014

Proper 13A/Ordinary 18A/Pentecost +8

The readings this week:

- Genesis 32:22-31 ◦ Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21
- Romans 9:1-5 ◦ Matthew 14:13-21

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Solitude

Have you ever looked at a picture ... a painting or a photograph ... and found that your eyes ... your attention ... was drawn to one area of that picture or painting ... one particular detail? Say ... something like a picture of a ship on the ocean or a lighthouse on a beach ... and even with everything else going on ... that particular object was all you really saw?

Well. Such is the case with our Gospel reading for today. We have a tendency to see just one thing ... we see and recall Jesus' miracle of the feeding the 5000. Even the way our church has pulled this reading out of Matthew's Gospel, cropped it out, if you will, enhances the way this account of the miracle stands out against a larger background. And what we miss ... is the larger setting. And in that, we miss something very important.

What Jesus had just heard was that John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, the Elijah who was to come before him, had just been executed ... cruelly beheaded. What do we read from Matthew was his reaction to this tragic event? He, with his disciples, immediately withdrew from where they were by boat ... Why? So Jesus could go and be alone in a desolate place. Why? Jesus was the Son of God ... yet, he was also the Son of Man. He NEEDED some down-time ... HE NEEDED some time with God, His Father, away from the immediate work at hand ... which, if we go back again before our reading ... we'd find that Jesus was healing the sick ... and getting quite a reputation for it.

And so then, as we read in our Gospel for today ... that even though Jesus and His disciples had withdrawn to a place to be alone ... the crowds had run around the lake



and were waiting for Jesus as He landed. No more a solitary place. In spite of His own needs, Jesus sees the crowds and has compassion on them ... and heals some more. But the remoteness of the place is the situation that necessitates the miracle of feeding the 5000 men plus the women and

children who had gathered.

And that brings us to the end of our reading for today. Jesus feeding the 5000 and the disciples picking up the twelve baskets left over. But that's not the end of the story ... if we were to let Matthew continue we'd hear these words: "Immediately, Jesus MADE the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while He dismissed the crowds. And after He had dismissed the crowds, he went up on a mountain to be BY HIMSELF to pray. When evening came he was there alone ..."

Now ... if we put this all together ... we see that as Jesus heard of John the Baptist's death, His first, His immediate reaction was to withdraw. And yet, we see His compassion on those who, more or less, would not leave Him alone ... And then, finally, Jesus gets to have that time to deal with His own feelings ... alone ... before His Father's throne in prayer.

That's the larger picture. And so the miracle in the middle of it all? It's important. But, is it really the most important thing happening here? A key, Jesus shows us, is to realize that we're not the ones in control ... God, Our Father is.

We'd be missing an important teaching of Jesus' ... if we ignored or glossed over the importance of solitude ... a teaching Jesus demonstrated by His own example as He handled the ups and downs of life. It's been said that such a time of solitude is a time of being alone ... without being lonely. It's a time to be refreshed and restored. It's a time to let go of the mistaken impressions we may have ... like, and I love this one: that the world depends on us to keep it going ... A time of solitude is a time to reset our compasses and understand that our worth and our value in God's eyes...

Solitude. It's one of those things that's not so much about doing ... as it is about being ... being alone in God's presence. Solitude is a time we often think is to be used for prayer, speaking to God... but it's also a time to be still ... and know who is God ... and who the servant is. To let Him bring to mind those things that trouble us ... and have Him encourage us to leave them before His throne of grace.

And that through this discipline of a disciple, God might make our lives and our faiths that much richer.

An excerpt from a sermon by Pastor Fausel, [Our Savior Lutheran Church, Louisville, KY](#)

Reflecting on the Word



___ 1st Reading: [Genesis 32:22-31](#)

To what extent do you think Jacob's plans are consistent or inconsistent with his prayer? How does the struggle with the unknown man give insight into Jacob's personality? How does the change of Jacob's name from "he deceives" to "he struggles with God" indicate the development of his character? In what areas do you struggle to trust and obey the Lord? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

___ Psalm Reading: [Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21](#)

Think of a person whom you see as reliable. Describe the person and your response to his or her reliability. What descriptive words and phrases are used about God in this prayer? What phrases suggest that God is reliable? How does God help those who are in need? What image of God comes through to you most clearly? How does the picture of God here compare or contrast with your image of God's reliability? Why is it important for you to know that God is reliable? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

Good and gracious God, we give you thanks and praise for your abundant gifts. We give you thanks that your promise of love, mercy and grace is all-inclusive. We give you thanks that you were willing to sacrifice yourself in Jesus Christ so that with him, we are made righteous in your eyes. Amen.

The psalmist uses the word "all" 12 times in this song of praise. We are given a picture of God who is not only *able* to but *does* include everybody and everything in God's abundant grace, mercy and love. You are not left out. No one is left out. It is the Lord who is and does all good things and it is we who cry out to the Lord to be saved from the wickedness that lives in each of us. Our sin will not let us escape from our wickedness, but God will destroy all the wicked that is within us because God loves us.



[Roz \(a.k.a. Rosilyn Young\)](#)

Our only job is to open our mouths and respond to this love with praise forever and ever.

[Nancy Quatier](#)
Bethania Lutheran,
Rosholt, S.D.

Burden or Passion?

Paul had a burden.

Paul had an intense burden that Israel would be saved.

This intensity drove him. This desire to see his people come to understand who Christ was and is became the one thing in his life that really needed to be accomplished. This passion that Christ instilled in his life would be that one thing that would drive all of his letters in doctrine that would become the main stay of the church. Our Father through the Son by the Spirit would place Paul on a platform that would last for centuries. His letters would guide millions of people to the Christ. They would transform the church. And they would lead people to understand who the Christ is. My question to each of us today is this. What is the passion Father through the Son by the Spirit has placed within your heart? He has placed that passion within your heart for a reason. That reason my friend is to accomplish that one thing that he has impassioned within you to accomplish. Now is not the time to let that passion go. Now is the time to go forth with all the power of God and see things happen.

[Living Church Fellowship](#)

___ 3rd Reading: [Romans 9:1-5](#)

What can I learn about Apostle Paul and his dramatic way of expressing his intense love for the Jews? How can I cultivate a heart like Apostle Paul's, of "great sorrow and unceasing anguish," for people's salvation? Given all the historical spiritual advantages of the Jews listed in this passage, their rejection (for the most part) of Jesus is particularly painful to Apostle Paul. What can I learn from this? [Koinonia Christian Fellowship](#)

___ 4th Reading: [Matthew 14:13-21](#)

When is a time when you longed desperately to be left alone? What were you feeling in that circumstance? When is a time when you felt a nudging or a command from God to do something and didn't feel up to the task? What did you do? When is your heart most likely to move you to action on behalf of others? What is this passage calling you to do? How have you seen Jesus stretch your resources beyond what you thought possible? [Small Group Series Discussion Guide](#)