

Karen Hollis August 2, 2020, Matthew 14:13-21

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us today, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Oh, what a strange summer. I was on staycation last week and was mostly at home. We've all been encouraged to stay close to home this summer. Seems like most BC residents are interpreting that as coming to Vancouver Island. As busy as that makes our region, it's good for all of us to spend some time enjoying the summer – it's good medicine – and we are going through a lot right now . . . personally and collectively. It's still too soon to tell how the pandemic will end and how bad it will get, how the stuff of life will be impacted by the larger story of the world right now. We are alarmed by watching the news – how each passing day can disturb us anew is unfathomable – we're worried, checking in with family members, needing connection, some people are hungry, others in the world are oblivious or opportunistic . . . or just trying to survive. This is the backdrop to life right now, to the story we're living. The context makes a difference.

This morning's gospel story is particularly familiar to us, and in Matthew's gospel context also makes a difference, because John the Baptist is killed in the scene before. The reading begins: "Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself."

Have you ever wanted to be alone – gone to great lengths to be alone and someone finds you? It can be excruciating . . . it can also be quite holy. Sometimes these encounters are particularly blessed. When the people find out Jesus has gone out of town, they follow him and find him; Jesus meets them of course with compassion in a holy space, spending hours with them and healing. Perhaps in his own state of grief, he resonates with their suffering, their worried, hunger, need for connection.

It appears the disciples also came with the crowd. Over the last while, Jesus has been teaching them about the kingdom of God – we've just had 3 weeks of readings on it. The kingdom is like – a mustard seed, it's like yeast added to flour. These two particular images are about something small that grows into something big. With this ongoing teaching in mind, it's interesting that Jesus asks the disciples to work the problem of how to feed a massive crowd of people. As they think it through and complain a bit . . . they know they don't have enough, but they identify that they have a little . . . they have something small. And there in the deserted place, the disciples step into the parable and learn about the kingdom from a new perspective.

Jesus blesses their offering and gives it back to them to share. The offering is theirs and not theirs – it is what we had in mind and not what they had in mind at all^[1] and they share it in faith.

The kingdom isn't just a concept or a thought experiment . . . Jesus not only teaches about it but helps people experience it. Every time Jesus is present with someone, teaches someone, heals someone, he opens the kingdom with them. On this particular day, Jesus opens the kingdom with people all day long. Things like grief and illness weaken the walls we put up in our daily lives, together with Jesus' healings, the people in the crowd have been in varying degrees of kingdom space with him throughout the day. They are primed and ready for this kind of experience, so when Jesus blesses and

breaks the bread, they are all in. All together they enter God's kindom and like the disciples, find they have something small that can become a lot: some olives, a loaf of bread, nuts, figs. The miracle is not multiplying food, rather inviting people into kindom space and making it real for them; their response is seeing the humanity in those around them; their response is generosity and connection. The small thing they have to offer becomes abundance. Collectively, we have what we need around us and within us – the kindom is about looking at it in a new way.

It's amazing what something small can grow to become and the impact it can have. Tangible things like food are really important, though the power of connection – that kindom space – multiplies what is offered. Connection is expansive – it eases suffering in ways few other things can.

Jesus is a teacher and practitioner of God's kindom and holds this space for us. In these days of covid, when we have a new perspective on your life and the world, what are you noticing? How are you being invited into connection? How are you being invited into the kindom these days? Jesus holds this space for us to find connection.

[\[1\]](#) NTW, Matthew p. 187