

PALTRY RESOURCES, GIGANTIC LOVE

Sermon for Pentecost 8A—Mt 14:13-21

LPC, 8/3/14

What would you do if I told you, “Go out and save the world”? Would you salute smartly, say “Aye, aye,” and immediately undertake a plan of cosmic salvation?

Me neither.

What are some of the responses you might make to such an unreasonable and grandiose directive? Besides, “Are you crazy?” I mean. You might say, “Not my job,” and you’d be right. Saving the world is God’s job. Too many people make themselves unhappy and sick by trying to usurp God’s job in saving the world.

I remember seeing a poster once (I may have mentioned this to you before) that said, “My beloved child, Please do not feel personally, totally, irrevocably responsible for everything. That’s my job. Love, God.”

No, overfunctioning is surely as much of a sin as apathy before God. “Let go and let God” is a very useful motto. It is not an overstatement to say that bowing before the superior knowledge, wisdom and power of God is the only way for human beings to find peace in this world.

But what about when it’s God who says, “Go out and save the world?” OK, you’re right. God never actually says that. God gives human beings much more modest tasks. Far from saying, “Go out and save the world,” God is far more likely to say something infinitely more comforting and accommodating. God says things like, “Go out and *help me* save the world.”

This is *so* much easier, isn’t it?

The biblical record suggest that, no, it isn’t. When God said something like this to Moses, Moses protested, “But I suck at public speaking!” (Or something like that.) When God said this to Jeremiah, Jeremiah said, “But I’m too young!” Jonah said, “Nobody’s going to listen to me!” The prophet Amos said, “I’m just a tree surgeon!” (Look it up.)

What’s our response when God tells us, “Go out and help me save the world”? What’s your reaction? “I’m too old...I’m too young... I’m not ordained...Our church is too small...My focus is on my family right now...I don’t have the time...I don’t have the resources.” If we’re really sophisticated in church jargon we might say, “That’s not really where my gifts lie.”

You may be thinking, “God doesn’t really say, ‘Go out and help me save the world.’” Perhaps not. But Jesus does say things like, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” “Forgive seventy times seven,” “Feed my sheep,” and in today’s Gospel lesson. “You give them something to eat.” You will be so missing the meaning of this passage if you take it simply as an historical account of something that happened. Remember, always, that when Jesus speaks to the disciples, he is speaking to us.

Do imagine this, will you? Pretend that there are 5,000 families out in that parking lot, camped out in the churchyard, hunkered down on the grass. Think Jamboree in the Hills or the parking lot at Milan Puskar Stadium without the tail-gating. Pretend that these people, all these people, have come here to this hill just to be close to something holy. They come and they come and they stay all day and they want to keep staying. But they're getting hungry. And Jesus says, "You give them something to eat."

Of course we're going to respond, "Does this look like Riesbeck's? We don't have the resources to feed all these people! We can't!" And that is what the disciples say (except for the Riesbeck's part, of course.)

It's not that the disciples have nothing to share. It's that what they have is so pitifully small. It didn't have to be five loaves and two fish. It might have been a single pizza or a box of cake mix. Regardless, what they have looks pretty paltry next to the extent of the need.

We are bound to feel the same way when God says to us, "Help me save the world." It's not that we are bereft of gifts. Some of us are smart and some of us have money and some of us are especially kind and some even have an especially deep faith. And we have all kinds of life skills and experience. It's just that our gifts seem so desperately inadequate to the need.

So what does Jesus do? Jesus takes the small bit of food, blesses it, breaks it into pieces and gives it out. If this doesn't remind you of the Eucharist, it should. In the Eucharist, the priest takes the bread and wine, blesses them, breaks the bread and gives it to the people. In communion, Christ himself is taken, blessed, broken and given to us. And in this we are saved.

Back to today's scripture. Jesus takes what the disciples have, paltry as it is, blesses, breaks and gives it, and five thousand families are saved.

Jesus will take whatever we have, however piffling, bless it, break it, and give it, and people will be saved. Not through any power or merit of ours, but by the gigantic love of God.

Do you remember the movie *Apollo 13*, the true story of three astronauts trapped in a disabled spacecraft between the earth and the moon? At one point the air filtration in the module begins to fail, threatening suffocation for the astronauts. Back at Mission Control, a team is tasked with solving the problem. As they gather together, someone dumps a carton of random articles on the table and says, "Here's what they have. To fix the problem, we can only use this stuff and nothing else." The team finally puts together a makeshift filter, sends the assembly instructions to the module, and the astronauts are saved. As I recall one of the components is a used sock.

That team at Mission Control used what it had and saved people. If we use what we have and place it at God's disposal, people will be saved. How is not necessarily our problem. That's God's department. But when *we* give what *we* have to God's purposes, people are saved.

Moral of the story: when God says, "Go out and help me save the world," our first response can be, "Who, me?" as long as our ultimate response is, "Here I am, send me." And people will be saved, not through our own piffling efforts, but by the gigantic love of God.