

Small Group Discussion ?

TOGETHER WITH LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF
AUGUST 15-16, 2015 | MATTHEW 14:13-33

Dear God, help us get uncomfortable. Amen.

MATTHEW 14:13-33 [PARAPHRASED]

Jesus withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself, but the crowds followed him on foot. When Jesus went ashore, he saw a big crowd, and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. In the evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is late. Send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves."

Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." Jesus said, "Bring them here to me." He told the crowd to sit down on the grass. Jesus looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples. The disciples gave them to the crowd. About five thousand men, plus women and children, ate and were filled. They collected what was left over: twelve baskets full.

Immediately Jesus asked the disciples to get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. Then he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, Jesus was there alone, and the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land. Early in the morning Jesus came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" They cried out in fear.

Jesus spoke to them: "Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid." Peter answered, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, and started walking on the water toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened. Beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."



Together with
Lutheran World Relief

UP with God

What is Jesus like in the first story?

Is Jesus upset that a crowd has gathered, even though he might be tired? Does he send the people away, or does he welcome them? Why?

What happens when the crowd gets hungry? Does the disciples' idea to send everyone into the villages to eat seem like a good idea to you? Why do you think Jesus rejects this idea?

Is what happens next a miracle? What do you think happens in this story? Do the loaves and fishes magically multiply, becoming more than enough for a crowd of well over 5,000 people?

Or does everyone in the crowd reach into their pockets or bags to pull out the snacks they brought with them on this journey, and share? If we all shared what we have, would there be enough to feed everyone? Could that also be a miracle?

Does it need to be one or the other? Do we spend so much time trying to make sense of this story that we miss the God of abundance and generosity at the center? What is this story telling us about God?

What is Jesus like in the second story?

When Peter faces his own fear of sinking in the water, Jesus catches him. What do you make of that? What does that reveal about God?

Does God catch us in the midst of our fears? What does that mean? What can that possibly mean for people who experience all kinds of tragedy all around the world ... people who suffer, starve, die or lose loved ones? What does it mean for people who are trapped in addiction, estranged from their families, facing financial crises or trying to recover from a natural disaster? How does it feel when God doesn't seem to catch us?

Does this story tell us that if we can just trust more, we'll never experience those hardships? Does that sound right to you? Is that the reality we live in? Does the gap between a God who is supposed to save us from tragedy, and a world filled with tragedy, explain why many people cannot believe in any God?

So, what is our proclamation? What part does God play in this world? In what ways does God save us, and from what?

IN through community

What does this mean for our faith community?

When the disciples are faced with their own scarcity of food, Jesus tells them to feed a crowd of thousands. What does that mean for our faith community?

Do we ever care more about the church's programming for our own children than we do about helping kids in our community's poorest schools?

Do we ever care more about providing coffee for our congregation more than we do about making sure the community around us has enough to eat?

Do we ever care more about using worship music we like than we do about finding music that would speak to, and welcome, the cultural mix of people in our community?

Can you think of other examples like this? When does it go too far? Is there ever a time for a church to focus on the people inside its doors rather than out in the community, or out in the world? How do you know?

Are you living in scarcity or abundance?

What does it mean to live in scarcity? Are we worried that there's not enough of something (like money, time, space, love) to go around? What happens when we live like there's not enough? How do we act? Is it possible to be generous when we're living in scarcity?

What does it mean to live in abundance? Can we live in the belief that we'll find enough money, time, space and love in every situation? Is that a good idea? Is it wise? Why or why not?

What changes when we start to live in abundance? Is it possible to believe that this world has enough to go around? Can we live with open arms instead of clenched fists? Can God turn scarcity into abundance?

Check out this video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YD1VT7YR5I>

What do you think? What questions does this video raise? Does it provoke you? Where do you, and your faith community, fit into this story?

OUT for the world

Does the world live in scarcity or abundance?

Look at politics and economics in our country. Do you see people living out of scarcity or abundance?

Is there a significant gap between the rich and the poor? Is that gap growing? Why? Why do those who already have a lot need even more? Are they afraid that they'll run out of something? Do they think that those who have very little don't deserve to have any more? What do you think?

What does our economic system say about us, and what we value?

Where does Jesus enter into this discussion? *Does* Jesus enter into this discussion? Is Jesus concerned about being upwardly mobile, about how long someone has been on welfare, about who is cheating the system, and why there are so many immigrants? Does Jesus congratulate us on our long hours, our bonus, or our pay raise? Does Jesus want us to work harder so we can have more? Does Jesus want to reward our good behavior with riches and power? Do we ever see Jesus do those things in the Bible?

Or does Jesus feed the hungry, and help those in need? Have we twisted the story, somehow?

Does Jesus' economy exist completely outside of the economic system that we've created for ourselves? Do we sometimes fail to acknowledge this? For example, are we heading into a series of political discussions and debates in which candidates will throw around the word "Christian" while people continue to live homeless and hopeless on our streets? Do today's stories have anything to say about any of that?

See Pastor Jeff's recent blog: popmn.org/faith-and-politics/

What do you think? How would you answer the questions he raises? Do we have a responsibility to our country, and to the world? Do we have a responsibility to the poor and the vulnerable, wherever we find them? What is it?

Is this a one-way street?

Is it our job to bestow food and clothing and other things on those who have less than we do? Is it our job to give out grace, love, wisdom and insight to those who need it? Or could this be a reciprocal arrangement?

Is it possible that we have a lot to learn, also? Can we learn from people who have less than we do? What changes when we truly see the people we're helping as equals?