Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, August 2nd, 2026.

The Feeding of the 5000 with a reflection on the recent Tornado in the Fox Valley

Southwest Airlines used to have a marketing catch phrase, "Wanna get away?" This is Jesus in our Gospel for today. Jesus being fully human and fully divine, just heard of his cousin John the Baptist's death at the hands of King Herod. He wanted to get away. Maybe you are feeling this way.

Jesus takes to the lake and retreats in a boat by himself trying to get a break from the crowds that were following him. Perhaps he needed rest from all the ministry he was doing, healing, casting out demons, and preaching the inbreaking kingdom of God. Perhaps he just needed time to grieve the loss of a family member and friend.

Maybe you are grieving right now in the aftermath of the recent tornado in the fox valley whether it affected you directly or not. Everyone is hurting in some way. We all know someone who is hurting. Maybe you are grieving other losses in your life.

I am grieving for my neighbors who lost so much. I am grieving for the creation and all the trees that went down. I am grieving for the parks and the shade that is now gone. Your heart hurts when you drive through the neighborhoods that got hit the hardest. People have been displaced from their homes… navigating insurance claims and contractors… some with good intentions, some not so good. It is stressful making decisions and trying to figure out what to do at a time like this.

And yet, I see the helpers out there… lots of them. You included. Neighbors helping neighbors. Showing up for each other. Sharing information. Offering food and water… a listening ear. Just listening to other's stories is ministry. I was driving through Menasha the other day on my way home and a family came and offered me a hotdog at the corner.

In the Gospel, Jesus didn't get away for long. The crowds found him. They wanted to hear more of his teaching. It was refreshing and hopeful for them. It was inclusive and filled with love. They would even miss a meal or two to listen to him.

The Gospel says that Jesus had compassion for the crowd. Compassion in the original Greek is the word splagisomai. Which means Jesus felt their needs deep inside himself… literally in his entrails, his bowels. He felt their needs. He had affection for them. It made his innards turn when he heard of their needs. The bottom line is that Jesus has compassion for us too. He hurts when we hurt. We have a God who doesn't abandon us in losses, but walks in the middle of it with us.

The disciples on the other hand wanted Jesus to send the crowd away so they could get something to eat. Maybe they were just being practical. But then Jesus says, "They need not go away, you give them something to eat." The disciples respond, "We have nothing here but 5 loaves and 2 fish."

We have nothing here but…

Have you ever said something like this? I have nothing but. Or that's never going to be enough. My little contribution won't make a difference. Or we compare ourselves to others and think, someone else will take care of it. When I read this, I realize that every gift matters.

I can tell you what mattered to us. Someone texting you, reaching out to you, asking if you are ok, offering help, praying for you, bringing food or a generator. This is physical and spiritual food that feeds the soul. One of my friends at community first credit union on the Island lives in Menasha told me she doesn't have power yet. But Island shores offered her a private/vacant room to do her laundry. She was so thankful and joyful to share this with me. That was bread to her.

We might think my contribution isn't enough. But our Gospel moves us from a mindset of scarcity to abundance. Even the smallest gifts when given over to God can spark a miracle where all are filled.

Without someone letting go of those 5 loaves and 2 fish there would be no miracle. Imagine how many people kept their own bread and fish in their satchel and didn't offer it up to Jesus.

Jesus tells his disciples, "You give them something to eat." And after he blessed and broke what was offered to him, all were filled. And there were 12 baskets left over. Jesus provides enough and a little more. Jesus wants us to bring to him what we have. And don't compare it to others or what you could do in the past. When you place it in his hands, ordinary gifts can inspire others and be more than we can imagine.

This miracle story is a story of abundance. God is a God of abundance, even when it seems impossible. In John 10:10, Jesus says, "I came that all may have life and have it abundantly." The very mission of God is to give abundant life to all people. And when that doesn't happen, or when people lose what is most dear to them, or when hungry mouths don't get fed, Jesus hurts. He has compassion for us in our particular situations.

Thankfully, today we experience the abundance of God's grace. In the word and in communion. We are abundantly forgiven. We are reminded that we are enough… that our contribution is enough no matter how big or small. So let us go out and respond to the abundance of grace we have received and share it with others. Amen.