

August 6, 2023
“Blessing Beyond Belief”
Genesis 32:22-31 / Matthew 14:13-21
Pastor Tim

No sermon today. Just a brief meditation, and an invitation to meditation. On blessing. Blessing beyond belief.

It strikes me that what links our two readings this morning is blessing.

From Genesis we get the provocative, dreamlike story of Jacob wrestling the angel.

Jacob is alone at this point. And he is afraid that his brother, Esau, is coming to kill him after Jacob stole Esau's blessing as the first-born from their father, Isaac.

Blessing is clearly on his mind, perhaps fearing that he is about to lose it. And so he wrestles this mysterious, presumed representative of God – or maybe God God-self, based on Jacob's reaction later. Note here that the Hebrew word for “wrestled” is a play both on Jabbok, the river Jacob has just crossed with his family and his servants, and the name Jacob.

Jacob wrestles like his life depends on it, and the mysterious figure, seeing that he will not best Jacob, puts Jacob's hip out of joint. While they're still wrestling. And then tells Jacob to let go.

But Jacob refuses. He refuses to let go unless the angel, or God, blesses him. Blesses him.

Jacob is bold, but again, likely also afraid that he's about to lose his blessing at the hands of his brother, Jacob demands a blessing. And he receives it. He wrestles and struggles his way through to blessing. He pursues blessing. He holds on to the possibility of blessing – again, like his life depends on it.

Sometimes we find blessing in the struggle. Sometimes we find blessing through the struggle, beyond the struggle. Sometimes the struggle is necessary to know and experience blessing. But the blessing is there, the Divine blessing is always there, beyond

even our own belief, waiting for us to see it. To believe in it. To claim it. To own it. To live into it.

In the other story we find Jesus seeking some solitude. He goes out on a boat, but the crowds track him. And they're waiting for him when he returns to shore.

Heavy with his own grief at the death of his friend, John the Baptizer, Jesus has compassion on them. He spends his day healing the sick, and then the disciples ask him to send the crowds away so the people can go and buy themselves something to eat.

But Jesus tells the DISCIPLES to feed them. Five loaves of bread and two fish, that's all we got. Not enough to feed so many. The blessing is beyond the disciples' belief.

So Jesus invites the people to sit down and make themselves comfortable. He takes the loaves and fish, looks up to heaven, blesses and breaks them. He gives the food to the disciples to pass among the people, and somehow, some way, all "ate and were filled." All ate and were filled. And it didn't cost a thing!

Blessing beyond belief. Blessing experienced in community. In sharing. Blessing grown out of compassion.

Sometimes we can't even imagine blessing, or remember blessing, because we are distracted by our misperception that what we have, or who we are, is not enough. We can't feed all these people, the disciples said. We do not have enough. We are not enough.

Sometimes we can't even imagine blessing, or remember blessing, because we are distracted by our hunger and our thirst. I'm not talking here about literal, physical hunger or thirst – where such distraction is necessary for survival.

I'm talking about being unable to imagine or remember blessing because we are distracted by what we want and don't have. Or by who we are not and want to be. Or distracted more broadly by the myth of scarcity, the belief that there is not enough to go around. Only five loaves and two fish.

But there IS enough to go around. There is enough to meet the need. We, individually and collectively, are enough to meet the need.

The blessing is there, the Divine blessing is always there, beyond even our own belief, waiting for us to see it. To believe in it. To claim it. To own it. To live into it. And to share it with each other.

And with this story, I have no doubt that that Jesus the justice organizer, the radical revolutionary, the one always pointing us to another Way, a better Way, means for the disciples, all of us, to understand, to REMEMBER, that there IS enough to go around in every sense of the word.

There IS ENOUGH to go around, so that all who hunger and thirst will be fed – in spirit and in body. So that none will go hungry or thirsty.

This is both a spiritual and an economic lesson. Note the not-so-subtle critique of consumerism and capitalism. The disciples were ready to send the crowds out to BUY their own food. Jesus' impromptu meal costs nothing.

Echoing the prophet Isaiah: "Hear, everyone who thirsts; come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your earnings for that which does not satisfy?"

For us, like the disciples, the story reads as a miracle. For Jesus, it's nothing more than bringing back to the surface, bringing back to life, the blessing of abundance we've buried through denial or ignorance or greed or waste. The abundance is already there, it's always there. And it doesn't cost a thing!

God has blessed us with abundance, within and all around; it is we who continue to curse ourselves and each other with scarcity. Literally, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually.

Feed each other, Jesus says. There IS enough. The blessing is always there. Even beyond our belief. Even beyond our practice.

So in that spirit, I invite you to your own – brief – meditation on blessing. I encourage you to close your eyes as a way to narrow your focus and reduce distraction. Do whatever you need to do to make yourself comfortable.

Take a deep breath, deep in ... and deep out. Take another. Breathe in God's blessing. Breathe in your divine blessedness and belovedness. Breathe out your disbelief.

If you are struggling, WRESTLING like Jacob, feeling like blessing has been taken from you, or is soon to be taken from you, or is far from you, BE like Jacob and hold on. HOLD ON and remember that you are already blessed beyond your own belief, beyond your own imagination.

The blessing is there. It's within and around you. The Divine blessing is always there, waiting for you to see it. To believe in it. To claim it. To own it. To live into it.

Take a deep breath in ... and a deep breath out. Breathe in that blessing. Breathe in your divine blessedness and belovedness. Breathe out your disbelief.

And if you are like the disciples, unable or unwilling to believe that five loaves and two fish is enough to feed thousands. If you are like the disciples, stuck with any belief within yourself that what you have or who you are is NOT enough to be blessed, or to be a blessing, OR stuck with any belief beyond yourself that there simply is not enough blessing to go around, imagine yourselves first sitting among the crowds. Hungry and thirsty – but at Jesus' invitation to claim your seat at the table, in the soft grass, hungry and thirsty no more. Satisfied.

Take a deep breath in ... and a deep breath out.

And now imagine yourself as one of the disciples, passing baskets of bread and fish among the crowds, the thousands, amazed that somehow there is yet more. Amazed that there is actually more than enough to go around.

What you have, who you are, what God has already provided all of us, is enough. It is more than enough, to be blessed and to be a blessing. Even beyond your belief.

God's abundance, the Divine blessing, is there, always there, waiting for us to see it. To believe in it. To claim it. To own it. To live into it. And to share it with others.

Take one more deep breath. Deep in ... and deep out. Breathe in that blessing. Breathe in your divine blessedness and belovedness. Breathe out your disbelief.

And finally, receive as blessing these words from the poet, Mary Oliver:

*Why worry about the loaves and fishes?
If you say the right words, the wine expands.
If you say them with love
and the felt ferocity of that love
and the felt necessity of that love,
the fish explode into many.
Imagine him, speaking,
and don't worry about what is reality,
or what is plain, or what is mysterious.
If you were there, it was all those things.
If you can imagine it, it is all those things.
Eat, drink, be happy.
Accept the miracle.
Accept, too, each spoken word
spoken with love.*

May we all lean and live into the assurance of God's love, God's blessing, God's abundance, for ourselves, for each other, for all of Creation.

And may it be so.