

Sermon
Divine Intervention – Renewal and Restoration
Pastor Lisa Giacomazza
Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church
August 6, 2023

It is lovely when we receive an invitation to a dinner where nothing is expected in return, isn't it? You are invited and the host tells you – no really, just bring yourself...no need to bring anything, I've got it all covered. But most of the time, this is not the case. We are invited and offer/are expected to bring along something as a gift for the invitation. And like our communion meal today, Jesus broke bread and poured wine, inviting all to a heavenly banquet, but followers are instructed to feed his sheep.

Today's text from Isaiah begins with such an invitation – all are invited to the water, but God reminds followers to eat the good things that matter. Isaiah is speaking to Judean exiles in Babylon, the highly educated and wealthy who were deemed important enough to deport from Judah to the empire of Babylon. After many generations in exile, they have accumulated some wealth, some possessions and Isaiah is reminding them where they came from. The new Judah will look nothing like the flamboyant Babylon to which they have become accustomed.

Peoples who have been exiled are everywhere in our world today. Forced from their homes due to poverty and starvation, corruption and anarchy, rape, murder, and lack of resources...they flee with just what they can carry and come here either through legal means or slip over our borders. They are far from their home and yet many over time prosper and are able to send money back home to

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relatives left behind. Some complain about losing their cultural values here. Back home they knew their neighbors, took care of one another's children, helped each other out in hard times and found enjoyment in simple things. They recognize that the consumerism of the US has changed them. The flashy Gods of Babylon lewtered the people ... why not live a little and consume like everyone else? Eat the fast food, get sucked into TV, obsess over sports...all the while ignoring our neighbor...after all, they probably just want something...gotta take care of number one.

This scripture from Isaiah is an opportunity for us to pause and evaluate our own lives...and ask, have we been lured into the greed and comforts of Babylon? Are we consumed by our gadgets and not seeing the people both in our lives and those around us?

This communion we celebrate each month is a banquet God invites us to and it is an uncomfortable one...it's that invitation where we are expected to perform some kind of action after we partake in this feast. And did I mention that ALL are invited to this feast? Those who don't live or look like us...yeah, this is for them too.

Do we complain about immigrants? Do we think they deserve to have as much happiness as we have as natural born citizens? If we are being honest?

The account of the feeding of five thousand in Matthew has been an inspirational story that we first heard of as children in Sunday school, if you've followed the faith since then. This comes just after the disciples and Jesus learned of the murder of John the Baptist and they are hurting. They want to tell the

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crowds to go away so they can have time to mourn the loss of their dear friend. We read, however, that Jesus had compassion, and he invited the multitudes to eat. The disciples were shocked, for they could locate only two fish and five loaves, hardly enough to feed themselves, much less a crowd of thousands. Nevertheless, Jesus instructed them to feed the crowd and not only did all get enough to eat, but there were also twelve baskets left over.

This is the only miracle story found in all four gospels. It was clearly very important to the early church. It shows exactly what we talk about time and time again...that God is love. God loves God's people in every situation no matter what. Showing compassion for the people is God's primary motivation in this story. It is not a lesson or to show in some roundabout way what God is...this one is crystal clear – God is love. And God expresses that love through human beings. The disciples were grieving yet Jesus asks them to serve. And you may think that isn't very kind but Jesus knows that when we need it most, God will give us the power to work for good in the world, something many of us have experienced firsthand.

I have been crippled by anxiety throughout my life and it has been a powerful force. But I had my own five thousand experience and felt God's abundance in love for me through a firsthand experience. I was then able to share that experience throughout my life-giving courage and strength to others...not through me but allowing others to see God through my eyes.

The promise of the story of the feeding of the five thousand is that if we join together in unity and faithfulness, God will be with us. It is not a promise of the absence of struggle and pain – Jesus even had to go the way of the cross – but

a promise that God will be with us and that God's intention for love, peace, and justice in the world will ultimately prevail.

The miracle that took place on that hillside in Galilee 2,000 years ago was a miracle to those 5,000. Today, this message of love and hope that it brings knowing God will provide through creation's abundance and all we can do when we unite our hearts and voices, is a miracle today that we are called to be partners with God in making fullness of life become a reality today for the world that God loves. If we can just shed some of our electronics and move away from consumerism, and move toward sharing of resources and embracing all, we can move toward the world that God imagined for us. I declare that today our communion table is such a place.

Amen