

When someone else needs something you've got, what do you do? This is the question that suddenly faces the disciples today. Five loaves and two fish were probably enough to feed themselves and Jesus. They set out on the picnic prescient of the Boy Scout motto, "Be prepared." With ample food, they thought they were ready for any emergency. How were they to know that 5,000 men, not counting women and children, would show up empty-handed that day? And what were they to do when someone else needed what they brought?

The solution the disciples propose is a sensible one; it's hard to fault them. "Send them away," they suggest, "so they can buy food in the town." This happened in the days when people bought food in town, it was long before chain restaurants and hot dog vendors, and the place where they were was deserted.

Bad planning on Jesus' part? Hardly. He had gone to a deserted place not to be with the crowd, but to be alone. John the Baptist, his cousin, his best friend, had just been murdered; when Jesus heard the news ~~and~~ he wanted to be alone for a while. He went to a deserted place, but the crowd followed, seeking cures, seeking wisdom. Jesus, like his disciples, suddenly faced the question, "When someone else needs something you've got, what do you do?"

The solution Jesus proposes is quite different. He doesn't send the crowd away; he cures the sick and tells the disciples, "Give them something to eat." They had little food to share with the hungry, Jesus had little energy to share with the sick. The Gospels rarely tell us how Jesus feels, but in this story we know; Matthew tells us his heart, his sacred heart was moved with pity. Jesus had compassion on those who needed him. Yes, it was a miracle that the hungry were fed when the disciples would have preferred to save their food, but it was also a miracle that the sick were cured when Jesus would have preferred to save his energy.

What do you do when someone else needs something you've got? Take our country for example. We have many poor, hungry people. This week we remember the days when we became the first and only nation in history to explode nuclear weapons in war. It's a time to reflect on our national budget for arms and our budget for food, to discern whether we say of the hungry, "Send them away to buy food in the town," or "Let's give them something to eat ourselves." How long can the hungry live on an Oliver North hamburger, served with shredded lettuce and a secret sauce?

We can take stock of ourselves, too. Maybe this week you won't see people hungry for food. But we will see people hunger for our love, our wisdom, they'll hunger for a word of encouragement to the soul, for a lower tone of voice. It'll be hot this week; we'll see people thirsty, tired, and crabby from living in the heat. It's here where we can imitate Jesus, whose heart was moved with pity. His response didn't cost him any money, it didn't even cost much time. It cost a kind word, and a moment of care.

We have so much with which we can feed others. We've got what they need. Some will send others away; some will share what little they have. These will feed 5,000 and more.