**Introduction**

Well, I didn’t win the lottery again. I think across the last 6 weeks of billion dollar jackpots that I’ve bought tickets, I’ve matched maybe 1 number. I should take it as a sign I guess.

But I start with that sad tale because I want to ponder today something about the reality that the fantasy of winning the lottery is about – abundance. Just the simple numbers in my head run something like this. The 1.2 Billion jackpot is something like 800 million immediately. Uncle Sam and Katie Hobbs would take their 400 million on that, but you’d still have 400 million dollars. And 400 million should easily throw off 40 million a year in income. You could spend 40 million in one year, still have all the capital and get another 40 million the next year. For someone who schedules bill payments two months out to be sure nothing bounces, that is an abundance that is comical. What couldn’t you buy for $40 million? Unless you are the Pac12, then you can’t buy your teams sticking together.

But anyway, that is the fantasy of abundance that buying a ticket gives you for a few hours at least. Although haunting that fantasy should always be the stories of all the bankrupt lottery winners. There is something about such easy abundance that we recoil from.

**Text**

Within our gospel text today – the familiar story of the feeding of the 5000 – there are three specific elements that I wish to hold before us.

The first is the place. “Now when Jesus heard about the death of John, He withdrew from there is boat to a desolate place by himself.” You can crib in besides desolate place, the wilderness or the desert. And the question about **the place** is **the purpose**. If John the Baptist, the forerunner, is gone, maybe now is the time for the mission to move into a different gear. Maybe now is the time for the threshing floor to be cleared, to swing the axe at the root of the tree. And that truly is one of the purposes of the wilderness. Rebels and Revolutionaries go to the wilderness to gather forces. So, when the report says “the crowds followed him on foot from the towns” and “the number was 5000 men”, you should hear in the background, an army is gathering. John the evangelist in his version of this is much more explicit. He records “that they were about to come and take him by force and make him King.” Everyone gathered that day was in the wilderness for the start of the revolution.

But what is the other reason you go out – by yourself – to the desert? I don’t know if we do this anymore, which might say something about us and our age more than anything. When we say we have to get away, we end up at Disneyland, or on a beach, or somewhere full of distractions. When other ages, including Jesus, went to get away, they removed all distractions in the hopes of connecting with God. The world’s oldest continuous monastery is at the foot of the Sinai Penisula, supposedly at the site of Mt. Sinai. God brought Israel out to the wilderness when they left Egypt so that they might know Him.

So the two purposes of going to the desert are at something of cross purposes. The ultimate worldly goal of revolution, or the ultimate spiritual goal of communion with the Almighty. It is a standing question of which one leads to abundance?

**Christology**

The second element I want to bring out is the description that Matthew gives to Jesus. “When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.” Unfortunately the word I want to bring out gets translated rather bloodlessly – had compassion. The greek word is -*splagnizomai* - I just love the sound of it and sound might give you some hints that it is a much more earthy word. *Splagnon* is your bowels and intestines and liver and all the inner parts. Splagnizomai makes it a verb. His guts were churned. Jesus gets out of the boat thinking he’s gone to a desolate place and what does he see? A great crowd that has followed on foot from miles around. This is where the Evangelist Mark inserts “like sheep without a shepherd”. And his guts are churned staring at the scene.

We live in an age of the memoir or the omniscient narrator or the voice over in the movie or TV program. We are constantly being told what people are thinking and feeling. As if the thoughts and feelings are more important than the actions. But all of that is really a modern flower. You get occasional works like Augustine’s Confessions which are the seeds. But it is rare in ancient literature that we are told someone’s thoughts or feelings. Even rarer for Jesus. The character of Jesus is told in what he does. But Matthew loves this word to tell us the inner life of Jesus. Yes, he had compassion, but more his guts were churned over our condition.

And because his guts are churned, Jesus does what he does. He healed their sick and he drew near with abundance. The reign of God that draws near is not one that separates the material and the spiritual. Christ has come to re-establish his reign over all creation. To restore everything that has gone broken or become twisted because of the groaning of the fallen world. The desperation and desires of that crowd, the brokenness that would drive one out to the desert – for rebellion or in a search for God – the Reign of This God intends to address. Because his guts are churned at the lack, the lostness. Because Christ can heal it, and provide bread in abundance.

That’s the third element, the abundance provided. Jesus asks them what they have and the answer is five loaves and two fish. This isn’t even enough for the 12. It’s probably the remains of a prior meal before getting in the boat. It’s enough for those who came to the desert to fast. But it’s what we have. And from what we have, Jesus looks to heaven and blesses it. And it is reported in three ways. Everyone ate. That is a miracle in itself. But they didn’t just eat, everyone was satisfied. Everyone had a nice round belly and was feeling sleepy. But even beyond that, they picked up 12 baskets full.

We are used to staring at 5 loaves and 2 fish. We are used to thinking this is for me, and its not enough. Our experience of the world – even our modern world with everything it produces – is not one of abundance, but of scarcity. Of fear that what I have today won’t last or be enough. Of thinking how do I share 5 loaves, with 12 brothers. And Jesus’ answer to all of that is “Bring them here to me.”

Bring them here to me. Bring your worries. Bring your lack. Bring your fears. Bring suspicions. Brings you brokenness. Bring whatever churns your gut. Bring them here to me. Bring your 5 loaves and 2 fish. And let Jesus bless them. Let Jesus show you what he does when his gut is churned.

**Moral**

Let us return to that thread of why we are here in the desert. Because Jesus frames this divine abundance with a question and an instruction. If you are out in the desert for the revolution, that is ultimately not even a zero sum game. Because you are going to destroy things in the process of taking them. But at best the purpose of the revolution is to take from someone else for ourselves.

Jesus first command to the disciples is “they need not go away, you give them something to eat.” When God draws near it is not to take from the world. God doesn’t need what the world has. If he needed more than what was on hand, he’d make it out of nothing. Christ has not come for the revolution. The 5000 gathered should not need to go steal from the world. Because God has drawn near in his word.

Of course the disciples look at Jesus like he’s gone crazy. “We only have five loaves and two fish.” So if the miracle does take care of the physical needs of the crowd, it is also aimed at the spiritual needs of the disciple. Whatever you have, if you bring it here, is enough. And you are going to be included in the miracle. God works through means. And those means in the text are the disciples. After breaking the loaves he gave them to the disciples. Those disciples are the only full witnesses of the miracle. They know what it came from. And it passes through their hands. And they collect the remains. And it is all more than enough – abundance.

And this is the call to us. The world is starving. It’s in despair and many don’t even know it. We cover that despair with distraction. We don’t go out to the desert. But we have the one thing that is needful. We have right here the forgiveness of sins. We have the proclamation of the Word of God’s love. His gut has been churned over you. And that bread of life has been placed into our hands to distribute. They don’t need to leave, you feed them. And if feeding them the bread of life requires a little bread, so be it. God will multiply it.

**Eschatological**

One last thought. This is not a normal communion day, but I felt it was important given the text.

This meal is the continued abundant providence of Christ. From the night he was betrayed this meal has not stopped multiplying. It is not stopped proving people with Christ himself. His gut was churned over our state and he continues – wherever this is done in remembrance of him – to provide for all our needs.

He has given us the Word and with the communion of saints we lift up this bread and drink this wine until he comes. We bring it all here – to this table. Because it is here that we see the miracle. Out of what we have, God creates his abundance. And it is more than enough. Amen.