
"They Need Not Go Away; You Give Them Something to Eat"

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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Recently, while backpacking in the Four Corners area of Utah, I awoke in the middle of the night to the sound of a small animal scurrying around outside my tent. At least, I *hoped* it was small. Earlier in the evening we heard coyotes calling in the deep canyons of Grand Gulch, where we were now four days into our trip. Curious, I unzipped the door of the tent and crawled outside, headlamp shining in the darkness, to find a fox scurrying away. Standing outside the tent, I turned off the headlamp, and looked up. In that moment, I saw more stars than I had ever seen. There was a fullness, depth, color, and abundance to this heavenly host that left me speechless. I will never forget it. The light from those stars had been traveling thousands of years to reach us in Red Canyon that night. Indeed, at that moment we were in the ancestral home of the Anasazi""from which the Puebloan tribes arose""and it occurred to me that the light from some of those stars began its journey at the same time the Anasazi lived in Grand Gulch, some two thousand years ago. In that moment, time and space seemed a seamless web of light. The light seemed to be everywhere, past, present, and future.

John Polkinghorne, the Anglican priest and physicist, has likened the dual nature of Jesus""both human and divine""to the dual nature of light, which we now know is *both* particle and wave. It is this incarnational understanding of Christ into which we live in the long, green season of Pentecost, and the abundance we find in the feeding of the five thousand, our Gospel text for this week, is no exception. When the great crowds pressed in upon them and Jesus was seeking some time alone""they urged him to "send the crowds away." Jesus' response is a call to compassion""a summons to them to "suffer with" ("*com-passio*") and take action to do justice (*Hesed*) to that suffering. It is a clear message to the disciples to see the situation differently: "*They need not go away; you give them something to eat.*" Most of us probably grew up hearing this story as "Jesus Feeds Five Thousand."

In truth, Jesus fed the disciples, who then fed the multitude. Perhaps this is a call to us to go and do likewise. It may be that the disciples were reticent to feed the crowd because they believed that what they had was simply not enough""indeed, they described it as "nothing." But in the hands of the living Christ, our limitations become God's bountiful abundance. He was not simply asking the disciples to change their offering of bread and fish into something more abundant. He was asking them to think, to imagine, more abundantly! He was asking them to change their ideas about the power of compassion here, now, in this world.

That night in Utah, the light from the stars, a seamless tapestry of time and space, reminded me of the Eucharist we celebrate together in this place, and which is seen in the foreshadowing of the Holy Communion in the feeding of the five thousand. Our present participation in past reality, and calling down of the spirit, are both a commemoration of the Last Supper and an anticipation of the heavenly banquet to come. In the meantime, we are called to participate in God's reconciling compassion right here, and now. Teresa of Avila said, "*Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours; yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion is to look out to the earth, yours are the feet by which he is to go about doing good, and yours are the hands by which he is to bless us now.*" Blessing, breaking, and giving ... we know how to do this, because *we do this together all the time*. Look up. Look around. The loaves and fishes spread, like light from distant stars, on that hillside long ago. Let us go and do likewise.

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