

“Jesus’ Second Most Stressful Day”

Matthew 14:13-21

Series: Summer Getaways Week 8

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The Boy

Joshua is hiding from his mother. If she finds him there would be more chores. There are always more chores. She must stay up late dreaming up jobs for him to do. “Milk the goat, feed the donkey, sweep the floors,” she says. “That’s crazy,” he protests. “Why is it crazy?” she replies. “Our house has a dirt floor.” She squints at him and says, “Don’t argue. Just do it.” This will never end. That’s why he’s hiding. If she catches him he’ll be knee deep in the animal pen with a shovel. He has to make a break for it.

Crouching in the back alley behind their small house in Migdal, Joshua desperately wants to escape with his friends. They can climb Mount Arbel that towers over their little village, go swimming in the Sea of Galilee, maybe hang out on the beach where his dad and the other fishermen pull in their boats and nets each morning. No, that sounds like more work. Besides, he’s sick of the smell of fish. It’s always in the air. Often the stench hits you in the face. The village of Migdal is known for its salted, pickled fish. Everyone in town works in the production – catching, cleaning, salting, pickling and selling. “Not much to be proud of,” Joshua thinks. But it’s all they have and recently they don’t even have that. The fish have disappeared. Every morning the nets are nearly empty. The whole town is afraid. No fish, no funds, no food.

“There you are,” His mother’s voice breaks his daydream. She caught him. Now it will be an afternoon of slavery. He feels like *he* is trapped in a net. But then she holds out a small woven basket. “Here Joshua. Take this to your father.” “What is it?” Joshua asks. “His lunch. He needs something to lift his spirits.” Joshua takes the basket. The warm, moist aroma of his mother’s fresh baked barley bread mixes with the familiar stink of pickled fish. “Don’t lose it,” she warns. “Our food is almost gone.”

Another chore. Well at least he is free from home. Once he delivers the meal he can escape with his friends. Running down to the beach he glimpses the sun climbing high over the hills on the far side of the lake. A beam of sunlight sparkles across the water. He spies only empty boats pulled up on the shore. No father, no fishermen, save one. “Micah, have you seen my Abba?” “He left with the others,” Micah replies, “to see the Rabbi Joshua on the other side of the lake.” Micah waves his hand dismissively.

The new Rabbi. Some say He is a prophet. Some hail Him as the new Moses, come to deliver his people. Some even claim He is David’s descendant, the rightful heir to the throne, perhaps even the long awaited Messiah. But others call Him dangerous – crazy, demon possessed, the son of Beelzebub, the torch that will send the whole nation up in flames. Joshua likes him but mainly because they shared the same name. To be truthful, the one time he listened to the Rabbi he didn’t understand His words.

When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Matthew 6:3

Joshua looked at his hands. His mother said his hands had a mind of their own. He didn't think the Rabbi meant that.

If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. Matthew 5:39

Every kid knows that's just dumb. Why just stand there and get punched twice?

I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 18:3-4

"A child like me the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Joshua thought. What kind of upside down kingdom is that? Kids are nothing. Kids can't do anything. What difference can a kid make? What difference can anyone make?

He ponders these crazy lessons as he walks along the north shore from Migdal to Gennesaret, Capernaum and Bethsaida. It isn't hard to find the Rabbi. The crowd keeps growing until they reach a broad open field that slopes from the lakeshore toward the hills. Joshua has never seen so many in one place. It seems the entire population of the Galilee decided to squeeze together in this one spot. They are all there: rich people, beggars, day laborers and ladies of the evening, soldiers, tax collectors, fishermen, Pharisees, mothers, children and elders. And in the middle is the one group that always follows the Rabbi. They are carried on stretchers, hobble on crutches, limp, even crawl. The blind are led by the hand. The possessed are tied with ropes. Feverish children are carried in arms. All hope for the touch of the Rabbi.

Joshua fears he will never find his father in this crowd. Then he sees a familiar face: Andrew. His father worked for Andrew and his brother Simeon. But that stopped when Andrew and Simeon gave up their nets and boats and followed the Rabbi. In fact Andrew and Simeon are standing next to the Rabbi in the center of the crowd. Weaving his way carefully through the mob Joshua finally reaches Andrew. "Sir! Please! Sir!" he cries, "My name is Joshua. I am the son of Eli from Migdal." Andrew looks as stretched and frayed as an old torn net. The crowd is beyond their control. Joshua holds up his small basket. Above the noise of the horde he shouts, "Sir! Can you please help me find my father? I must give him his meal." Andrew looks down at the boy. "Please, little one. We are busy here. Don't you see all these sick people. We don't have time to deliver a lunch." Andrew follows the Rabbi who plunges deeper into the swirling sea of humanity.

The Rabbi

"Executed? Beheaded?" He pauses for a moment to absorb the impact. It is true. The men who buried his body deliver the news personally. John, the Baptizer, His front man, His friend, His family, was cut down at the request of a dancing girl. And now the unbalanced king who gave the order searches for Him. Grief and dread sweep through

His soul. At the same time, His trainees return from their first preaching tour flush with joy and excitement. They each top the other with stories of miraculous cures, exorcisms and massive crowds. Death and life, sorrow and joy whip around Him. Crowds press against them. It is smothering, claustrophobic. He stands like the calm center in a hurricane. They need to get away, to rest, to grieve. “Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while” (Mark 6:31), He says as they board the boat. On the lake they find peace. For Rabbi Joshua, the one we call Jesus, it is the most stressful day yet since John baptized Him. Now John is dead and He is a hunted man. He knows there will be another day more stressful still to come. Yet this one is about to get worse.

Long before they land on the shore, they see them: a great multitude of human misery swarming before them. The very crowds they try to escape now dwarf their tiny boat. They groan. “Shall we head south Master?” Simeon asks. With a slight shake of His head, the disciples understand and set a course straight into the storm. The Rabbi lets out a sigh but it is not a complaint. It’s compassion. When they beach their craft He immediately wades into the mob. Healing, preaching, teaching. Hours pass. The brutal sun climbs to its zenith and descends without a pause in the action. All those people, like a massive flock of sheep, stand in eerie silence hungry for every one of His words.

But now the shadows grow long. Restlessness sweeps over the gathering. The disciples know hunger can ignite a riot. Philip approaches the Master,

This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food. Matthew 14:15

This request is a reasonable, compassionate, sensible. What happens next is not. It causes the disciples to think the stress has finally unstrung their Rabbi.

Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”
Matthew 14:16

Stunned, Philip stammers, “Eight months’ salary will not buy enough for each to have a crumb.” “There are five to ten thousand people out there,” James says. “There’s not enough food to feed them in all the Galilee.” The Rabbi sighs – this time in frustration. Their minds are still closed. He teaches them to look for opportunities. They see only problems. He speaks of God’s abundance. They see only scarcity. They look in their pockets and find holes. He looks up to His Father who created the whole universe.

Then Andrew speaks. At the time, he meant it as a joke.

Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many? John 6:9

Andrew twice emphasizes the small size of this poor man’s meal. Not enough to feed a hungry fisherman. It’s absurd. But the Rabbi doesn’t laugh. Like a Good Shepherd, He commands the massive flock to settle down on the green pasture beside the still waters.

At the same time, Andrew looks through the crowd and finds the boy who, a few minutes before pestered him about the lunch. “Come son. The Rabbi needs your lunch.” “Oh no this is for my father. If I give it to you he’ll have nothing. My parents will punish me for giving away the last bit of our food. Why does the Rabbi want to take my food for Himself?” “It’s not for Him,” Andrew says, “He wants to give it away.” “To whom?” “To them,” Andrew sweeps his hand over the multitude. “He wants to feed them with your lunch.” “Right. I may be a kid but even I know that’s impossible.” “With God, nothing is impossible,” Andrew repeats a little doubtful himself.

Soon Joshua is face to face with the Rabbi. “So you are the boy with the loaves and fish” the Rabbi smiles. “Why do you want to take my father’s lunch?” “I will not take it,” the Rabbi says, “It is no good unless you give it freely.” “It’s so little, how can it feed all these people?” Joshua asks. “It is little in your hands,” the Rabbi replies. “But if you place it in My hands it will be enough for all of them and then some.” Joshua looks down. After a moment the Rabbi says, “You are afraid little one.” “Yes sir.” “You fear if you give away the last bit you have, your father will go hungry and your parents will punish you.” “Yes,” Joshua manages to say. “Look at me,” the Rabbi says. Joshua lifts his eyes and stares into the Rabbi’s. “My Father will not let that happen.

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Luke 6:38

Joshua hands over the basket. Carefully, the Rabbi takes the tiny fish and barley loaves in His carpenter hands. He lifts them up to heaven and prays a blessing over them. Then He breaks them and gives them to His disciples. And He breaks them...and breaks them...and breaks them. It goes on endlessly. The disciples run back and forth passing bread and fish to the gatherings of fifty or a hundred. The stream of food never fails until the people cry, “No more. I can’t eat another morsel.” The disciples are certainly stressed that day. But at least everyone goes home stuffed.

Are you stressed? What has you twisted tighter than a snarled fishing net? School work? Commute? Deadlines? Driving the kids to four different places at once? Marriage problems? Strained family relationships? Financial troubles? An illness? Too many tasks not enough time? Jesus knows how you feel. He wades into the swirling cauldron of all our emotions. He is not shielded from weariness, threats, unreasonable demands or the grief of losing someone He loves. On this day He faces them all at once. In such times it is tempting to see only problems, only obstacles, only scarcity. The disciples stick their hands in their pockets and come up empty. Jesus lifts His hands to His Father in Heaven and comes back overflowing. The feeding of the five thousand is a miracle of abundance. It tells us all the abundance of heaven is available to do what God calls you to do.

But be careful. This is not a promise of prosperity. It is not wishing upon a star to make your dreams come true. Little Joshua has to give away his dad’s lunch and let Jesus do whatever He wants with it. When Joshua places that tiny lunch in Jesus’ hands the Lord does four things with it: He takes it, blesses it, breaks it and gives it away. Your life may have stress. Your life may be squeezed into a press. Your life may be a mess. But

your life can be blessed if you place it in Jesus' hands. He will take you, pray over you, break away what separates you from God and then give you away. Following the most stressful day of His life, the Crucifixion, Jesus returns to take His disciples, bless them, break them and give them away. They perform a miracle that makes the feeding of the five thousand look like a tiny tea party. They feed a starving world the Bread of Life, the Word of God, the Good News of Jesus. And that bread is still being passed to us this day.

You may say, "I'm so small, I'm so young, I'm too old, I'm too stressed, I'm too busy, I'm too clumsy to make a difference." If God can feed up to 20 thousand with a little boy's lunch then you are not too small. If God can reach the whole world with the Good News from 12 disciples then we are not too small. The only things too small are the minds that say it can't be done and the hearts that don't want to give. This fall we will discover a Faith that Works in the Letter of James. Sign up for a Growth Group and invite three friends or family members to the kick off on October 2nd. Imagine the multiplication if every one of our disciples invited three people – a thousand people would discover the amazing life God planned for them. 1000 stressed people would find out how God can feed and satisfy their spirits.

That Night

"Mom?" She turns around. There is Joshua at the door with her husband Eli. "Where have you been," she cries. "It's been hours. It's pitch black out there. I thought someone stole you." "Mary, calm down," Eli says. "You sent him looking for me and he found me. I went beyond Bethsaida with the others to see Rabbi Joshua." "Rabbi Joshua. What good is He? Roams around preaching God will provide and here we are down to our last morsel," Mary complains. "Well, did the boy give you the lunch?" "Not exactly," Eli replied with a grin. "What!" she begins to sob, "With our pantry bare you lose precious food?" "Wait Mama. I didn't throw it away. I gave it away...to Rabbi Joshua." "How could you do that? Now we have nothing." "I wouldn't say that," Eli replies. "Come see." When Joshua and Eli lead her outside the house Mary stops and stares in awe.

There stand twelve baskets full of bread and fish.

"He said if we give, we would receive," Joshua said. "He told me to take it home and to keep giving."