

**Christ Episcopal Church, Valdosta**

**“Much More Than Enough” (Matthew 14:13-21)**

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In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

One of my favorite comedy films is the hilarious 1991 film *What About Bob?* It stars Richard Dreyfuss who plays Dr. Leo Marvin, a brilliant but narcissistic New York City psychiatrist, and Bill Murray, who plays Bob Wiley, a particularly ingratiating patient. Bob’s first session with Leo begins with a long awkward silence until finally Bob says, “Why don’t I start. The simplest way to put it: I have problems. I worry about diseases so I have trouble touching things—public places it’s almost impossible. I have a really big problem moving.” “Talk about moving,” Leo interjects. “As long as I’m in my apartment I’m okay, but when I wanna go out I get weird.” Leo presses, “Talk about weird.”

“Talk about weird,” Bob continues, “Well, I get dizzy spells, nausea, cold sweats, hot sweats, fever blisters, difficulty breathing, difficulty swallowing, blurred vision, involuntary trembling, dead hands, numb lips, fingernail sensitivity, pelvic discomfort...” Leo shifts in his chair, “So the real question is...what is the crisis, Bob? What is it that you are truly afraid of?” Bob responds with his own questions, “What if my heart stops beating? What if I’m looking for a bathroom and can’t find it and my bladder explodes? Have you ever heard of Turrets Syndrome, involuntarily shouting profanity?” “Leo is wary, “It’s exceptionally rare.” And then Bob erupts in a profanity laced tirade. And that is how the distinguished and accomplished Dr. Leo Marvin begins getting to know the neurotic and needy Bob Wiley.

It is summertime and Leo and his family head to New Hampshire for their month long summer vacation at a lake house. But as you guessed, Bob Wiley figures out where they are and to Leo’s horror, shows up on their vacation. Bob whines to Leo, “Look I’m in really bad shape. Come on, please! Gimme, gimme, gimme, I need, I need, I need! Gimme please!” Leo finally shouts, “All right!” And throughout the rest of Leo’s vacation Bob Wiley is always there, befriending Leo’s family to the point that it eventually Dr. Leo Marvin who loses his mind.

Believe it or not, there is actually a correlation between the dynamics in *What About Bob?* and today's gospel passage. Jesus has just found out about the awful death of his cousin John the Baptist, who was only six months older than he was and who had baptized him in the Jordan River. As you may remember at the request of Herod John the Baptist was beheaded in prison. Jesus was devastated and wanted some time alone. Perhaps some of you can relate and recall instances in your life when you were going through something really difficult and needed some time alone to process it. Matthew tells us, "Now when Jesus heard about this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns" (Matthew 14:13). Although probably not as toxic as Bob Wiley, the dynamic with this crowd toward Jesus was similar—"Gimme, gimme, gimme, I need, I need, I need!"

How would you respond in that situation? Matthew reveals to us how Jesus responded, "When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick" (Matthew 14:14). All day long Jesus ministered and yet the neediness of the crowd continued, "Gimme, gimme, gimme, I need, I need, I need!" until it was evening. Then Matthew recounts what happened next:

When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children (Matthew 14:14-21).

In spite of his grief and fatigue Jesus kept on ministering to the crowd. Incidentally this miracle of the feeding of the multitude is the only one of Jesus' miracles recorded in all four New Testament accounts of the gospel. It is a miracle so familiar you may be tempted to gloss over it because you "already know" that story. But there is actually much more to this miracle than meets the eye.

Before Jesus performed this miracle the disciples described the setting: “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late.” Can you relate? Is there is circumstance in your life that has left you feeling isolated in “a deserted place”, running out of time because “the hour is now late”? Again and again in scripture we see God providing for those in a deserted place—from Moses and the Israelites, to the prophet Elijah, to John the Baptist. Again and again God demonstrates that the answer to the psalmist’s question, “Can God spread a table in the wilderness?” (Psalm 78:19) is a resounding yes. And again and again in scripture we see God come through in the nick of time when “the hour is now late”—from Abraham and Isaac on in the mountain, to Moses and the Israelites trapped between the Red Sea and Pharaoh’s rapidly approaching Egyptian army, to Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead when it appeared to be way too late.

There are times when we are in a deserted place and running out of time, times when we need Almighty God to help us, times when we need the truth of the gospel of God’s unconditional love and we need to heed Bob Dylan’s warning “Let us stop talking falsely now for the hour is getting late” (from his song “All Along the Watchtower” on his 1967 album *John Wesley Harding*). The disciples knew this was the case with the crowd and so they pleaded with Jesus, “Send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.”

Then Jesus stunned the disciples with his response, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” Again, can you relate? Is there a circumstance in your life when people are turning to you for answers, looking to you to provide for them what you think it is impossible to provide? The disciples replied to Jesus just as you and I would: “We have nothing but five loaves and two fish.”

And Jesus responded with overflowing grace. Jesus did not tell them the five loaves and two fish were not enough. Jesus did not order them to figure out a way to acquire more loaves and fish. Jesus met them exactly where they were with his simple command, “Bring them here to me.” In other words, Jesus told his disciples, “I know we are in a deserted place. I know the hour is late. I know all you have are five loaves and two fish for this this huge crowd of neurotic needy people crying out, ‘Gimme, gimme, gimme, I need, I need, I need!’ Just surrender what you have to me, and I will take care of it.” Then Jesus asked the crowd to have a seat in the grass: “Take a deep breath. Have a seat. I will take care of you.”

And Jesus performed a miracle with what the disciples actually had, and multiplied the five loaves and two fish so much so that every single person in the huge crowd not only ate, they ate until they “were filled,” and there were still leftovers, enough to fill up twelve baskets. God indeed provided a table in that deserted place and came through even though the hour was late. God indeed took what meager supply the disciples had and worked with that. And God indeed provided much more than enough, which is how God’s grace works—it is always much more than enough.

And God can do the same in your life. You may not be as neurotic and needy as Bob Wiley—although if you are, God can handle it—but what Dr. Leo Marvin asked Bob in the movie, I am asking you right now, “What is the crisis? What is it that you are truly afraid of?” Or as in today’s gospel passage, where in your life do you feel stuck in a deserted place, running out of time? What meager supply of yours is God perhaps asking you to surrender to him so that in the same way God took care of the crowd (and the disciples) God will also take care of you?

And as if that were not enough, when it comes to this miracle, in the words of every infomercial ever, “But wait...there’s more!” Did you notice what Jesus specifically did with the loaves and fish? Four things: he took them, blessed them, broke them, and gave them away. All that foreshadowed exactly what Jesus would later do at the Last Supper as he instituted the sacrament of Holy Communion, when as Matthew also wrote, “Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body’” (Matthew 26:26).

Moreover, in the aftermath of John’s account of the miracle of the feeding of the multitude he tells us Jesus proclaimed, “I am the bread of life...I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (John 6:48 and 51). And the day after Jesus instituted Holy Communion he did just that—he gave his flesh on the cross for the life of the world, including you.

No matter what the crisis is in your life, no matter what it is you are truly afraid of, no matter how much you are in “a deserted place, and the hour is now late”, God still loves you...and God’s grace remains much more than enough.

Amen.