

Sermon for Seventh Sunday after Epiphany
Reformation Lutheran Church
February 24, 2019

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Grace and Peace to You from God our Father and from His Son our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

Many of you know about my day job but some of you may not. I'm a chaplain over at Nathan Adelson Hospice on Swenson Street near UNLV. In addition to visiting with people who have recently and not so recently lost loved ones I also visit patients and their families in a twenty bed in-patient unit. My day begins in an interdisciplinary morning report. And I will tell you that it is a pretty intimidating space to be. And not just because I have to stay awake after wrestling with a toddler to get him to school. I go in and it is a sea of scrubs and white lab coats. If any of you watch Star Trek it sounds like that techno-jibberish they talk on the bridge. "Patient is a 65 year old male with acute tachibraxiochitis present to myloromar node with a PPS of 20 last night we upped his roxenal and ..." you get the idea. There are times I sit in that room and feel very out of place. I'm pretty satisfied with my level of education but at times it feels like all I really know is a bunch of random facts about allegedly important dead people and some fan fiction about humanity's imaginary friend in the sky. So what I will do is overcompensate for this and start moving around like an amateur psychologist and start asking really hard questions about "how are you processing this?" or "What is your spiritual frame of reference to understand your frustration with your current level of incontinence?" I get so acutely aware of my short-comings that I try to make myself more than I am.

And I don't think I'm alone in this. I think people in lots of professions and in many walks of life from time to time get this sense of inadequacy. I listened to a podcast where a brilliant writer was interviewed and he talked about his profound sense of being a fraud and not talented at all which led him to depression and suicidal thoughts. Life is like this for more people than we would think. We live in a society that is constantly telling us to be more. At work and at home we so often face challenges that push us beyond our limits. Tasks multiply. Relationships get strained. Situations arise that we had no way on earth to plan or prepare for. We are unable to help people who need it the most. We end up working hard only to compensate for those who aren't giving a full effort. We work for people

who demand more of us than we feel like we can give. The system or dumb bureaucratic rules keep us from doing what we can. Bills pile up. People get promoted over us. Our health doesn't improve despite doing what the doctor told us to do – we're still sick even though many of us could run pharmacies out of our medicine cabinets. People walk out of our lives and say terrible things about us based on minor misunderstandings. The devotional we bought that our friend said was life changing sits dog eared at page three. Retirement is closer than we thought it would be. Retirement is harder than we thought it would be. The diet is not working. We feel like there is a missing person poster of us at the gym. School when it isn't boring crushes our souls. People we thought were friends turn their backs on us for no reason. There are no jobs out there to be had. Delays keep us from getting the checks that we need. Bad habits keep getting the better of us. Our phones keep ringing. Our calendars don't give us a break. There's a foot of snow at our house when we moved to Las Vegas to get away from it. Life gets very hard and we often don't feel like we have enough. We are made to feel that we are not enough.

But if you feel like you aren't good enough know that you're in some very prestigious company. The people that Jesus picked weren't good enough people – they were not the spiritual A team. They weren't even the B team. In the midst of our stories today these deeply invested followers of Jesus had the genius idea to send these crowds that gathered around him into villages to buy food. Now granted that the Reformation Lutheran church fellowship committee was not around to organize the pot-luck of the century but the disciples had a very dumb idea. To send crowds of multiple thousands of people into tiny villages to buy food assumed two things that probably weren't the case. 1. That these people had food. 2. That these villages had enough food to sell tens of thousands of people – without Costco. But logic didn't enter their heads because all that the disciples could think about was what little they could do. They couldn't see the need in the crowds. They couldn't see the lack of resources in the surrounding area. They couldn't see their rabbi curing the sick and healing them in their midst. All they paid attention to was what little they had.

Now Jesus saw what little they had too. But here's the big difference between Jesus and the disciples and too often it's the difference between Jesus and us. Even though he saw what little they had and he took it – he demanded it. And then he did something amazing. He gave thanks for it. He saw what little they had and it was not all he saw. He gave thanks for it.

He gave thanks for not enough. He gave thanks for too little. Jesus gave thanks for probably won't get the job done. And then he took his eyes and looked up at God the father in heaven. While the disciples could only see left-overs and scraps – Jesus saw what a powerful and gracious God could do – and even before anything was done Jesus just gave thanks. Did the food multiply magically? Were people simply satisfied while eating bread crumbs and tiny fish bites? We don't know. But Jesus got the job done with not good enough.

The lesson for us is simple. It does not matter what things we have – it only matters into whose hands we put them. Jesus is able to work with not good enough. Jesus gets to work in our lives whether or not we're competent, whether or not we have the right degree, whether or not we live in the right neighborhood and even if we don't have a home at all. With Jesus it doesn't matter if we're cool. It doesn't matter if somebody else is better looking or more talented. It doesn't matter if our sermons have enough movie quotes to keep people entertained. It doesn't matter if we like Donny are out of our element. It doesn't matter if our bank account has a bunch of zeros or if our bank account is zero. The question is never if we are good enough. The answer is that God is good enough.

We see that goodness in our lives – both in and outside of here. What Jesus does with us is the same thing he does for the disciples today. He takes what they have even though it isn't good enough and drives them to their neighbors. He doesn't expect them to fix the rotten to the core system of Roman provincial exploitation and corruption. He doesn't ask that they change the world - he simply says "Feed these people. Use what you have. I will do it." Remember it is never about what you have – it is only a matter of what hands you place it in. Look at two things and two things only – the hands of the people in front of you who need you and the hands of Jesus that take you to them. When I stop trying to use my imagined psychological powers to make people feel better and just offer sincere compassion and prayer I find not only do people accept my work more but I'm more satisfied as well. My job as a chaplain is not to "fix" any situation but only to let people know whose hands they are in – sometimes I can proclaim this in a prayer – at other times I can only express it by being silent and just listening – at all times I am a living reminder of those nailed hands that embrace the sick, the sorrowed, and the suffering – in the best moments the people I serve become that living reminder of what hands are holding me.

Whatever it is in your life – whatever challenge or struggle – wherever you feel like you come up short – that's where Jesus will meet you to give thanks to God and take your struggle in his hands. Those hands of Jesus give us so much and they move. Jesus is not like a wide receiver who plays for the Browns. Those hands move. We don't always give things to Jesus. We don't always trust. We're like Peter in the third story we hear today. We stumble on the waves. We feel the wind. Maybe that's you right now who are dealing with a problem so difficult that you cannot imagine how you're going to give it to Jesus. But it is those hands – those nailed, crucified, broken and yet capable hands – it is the hands of Jesus that extend out (move hands like cross) and hold us. It's not about what we have. It's about those hands that have us and simply will not let go.

Amen