

*‘What Do You Do with the Hurt that You Feel?’* Based on Matthew 14:13-21  
Delivered on Sunday, August 3, 2020, Absecon Presbyterian Church by Drew Mangione, pastor

On Saturday morning, Claire said she wanted to do something a bit more special with the kids. Saturdays are already ‘Special Breakfast Saturday,’ which means I make the kids whatever they want for breakfast. And by whatever they want, this is almost always: Pancakes. But after breakfast, we decided we wanted to extend the special part of the day. As you know, there aren’t many options in this COVID season. So, I said we should go blueberry picking in Hammonton. It’s outside, we will have a nice car ride, and in let’s be honest, most of you probably didn’t want to pick berries in the heat. So, we figured it wouldn’t be crowded and it wasn’t.

It was hot, but a lot of fun and we came home with 12 pints of delicious organic blueberries. We also stopped at a roadside stand and got some tomatoes, peppers, and corn. We got home around 5 p.m., but it wasn’t until 6 p.m. that I started making dinner. I had asked the kids if they were ‘very hungry,’ or ‘a little hungry.’ They had said they were only a little hungry and I believed them. They had eaten many blueberries already and pretzels, so, I assumed that I could take my time with dinner. This was a huge tactical error. I know better, but it wasn’t our only mistake.

Moments before I was finished making dinner, Claire made the next tactical error. She had the audacity to tell Josephine that she could not have a cough drop. Oh, the screams from a 2-year-old, which were only made worse by our next move: We told Josephine that we would be eating dinner out on the deck, where she normally loves to be. But now, I have to apologize to the diners at Rifici’s and all of my neighbors. Because this set off a 15 minute screamfest on the back deck.

No words could assure her, nor any affection calm her. Josephine wanted to be in the house eating cough drops and nothing else would do. We listened to her grievances – which were repetitive and said in shrill screams – and we assured her that once dinner was over, we would indeed go back in, but this was unacceptable to her, especially if she still had no cough drops. The truth was that even if we had gone inside with her, and even if we had just opened the whole bag of cough drops, she would not have calmed down or stopped. She was tired from being out in the sun all day. And she was tired because she didn’t nap. Only by working through this, through many more screams, and taking her to bed, did she calm down, and sleep.

Do you ever find yourself feeling a little bit like Josephine did last night? I’m sure you know those moments when nothing feels right, everything seems to just make you angry, and it is all because of something unresolved issue taking control over you. Sometimes it is simply hunger or fatigue, or both, but sometimes it is more.

How are you feeling today? What is affecting your outlook on life? For the past 4 ½ months, we have been on a roller coaster. Do you ever make jokes about wanting 2020 to end? I do. But just flipping the pages on the calendar, will not solve anything, not even if somehow everything goes back to normal, or at least looks like normal again. No matter if we could skip past the next five months and even put COVID behind us, what we have been going through is much more than just a pause in life. We have been going through change and change means loss. So much has changed in the last four to five months. Some things have changed for the better, some for the worse. Still other changes, we are unsure if it will be good or bad.

I've seen a lot of anger on social media lately, and no, I don't mean anything in the news. I mean the anger that is coming from ordinary people about the change all around us. There is so much fear and worry about what will be the end result of all this. It has been a fertile breeding ground for conspiracy theories and hate – raw hate – both in the ancient sense of dismissing one another as unworthy, and in the modern sense of actively attacking one another.

Usually it comes with a claim of 'it's just common sense,' but it comes over against another person's 'common sense' view. Often Christians will claim this excuse, that they have a righteous anger to stand up to sin, but there is a fine line before anger becomes hate.

You see, I don't think the anger actually comes from a righteous desire to help someone see clearly. It comes from our desire to be right. Indeed, I'm here to tell you that your political ideology does not make you a Christian. Being a Christian also, has absolutely nothing to do with being an American. And boasting your virtues to get notice and applause, does not make you a Christian.

Rationally, we know this, just like Josephine knows she can't have cough drops, and she knows that screaming at us is never an effective way to get what she wants. But deep down, even when we know something, it is an underlying problem that drives our behavior and needs to be addressed. For Josephine it was sleep, but for many of us, it is a hurt that we feel. And when we do not address those underlying feelings in some way, they gain control over us, make us act contrary to our values. So, what do you do with the hurt that you feel?

When you saw the gospel reading today, how familiar was it for you? When you realized it was the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000, did you stop reading and just move on to the sermon? It is one of those stories that is so familiar, we think we know it by heart. Yes, Jesus takes five loaves and two fish and feeds 5,000 plus. Well, since Jesus is God, He's just doing cool miracles to prove it. Right?

So, today, I want to focus on some things in the text that are not always readily apparent. You see, this is one of those stories that is so well known, that the details are lost on us. Most translations just say, "When Jesus heard this" or something like that. So, I inserted a bit of context from Chapter 14, verses 1 to 12, because what Jesus had just heard was news of the execution of John the Baptist. Herod Antipas jailed and later killed John to silence him.

Here was Jesus' cousin and predecessor in ministry, murdered for speaking out against the King. Can you imagine how you might have felt in this situation if you were Jesus? Who would you have turned to? Where would you have gone? This crisis is one of the most human moments we see in scripture for Jesus. I think if my cousin and predecessor in ministry were executed, I'd want to go be with family. But Jesus can't do that. Just a few more verses earlier, His hometown had again rejected Him. So, He could not go back to Nazareth, where He was just Mary and Joseph's son. And certainly, the last thing anyone would advise after Herod killed John, would be to draw attention to yourself as John's heir apparent.

When we remember that Jesus is God, we must remember He was fully human too. God did not come down to be one of us to start wielding divine wrath against us. No, God humbly submitted to what it is to be a human being, with all its limits. So here was Jesus, the embodiment of God on earth, wrestling with His human emotions.

When His hometown rejects Him, this foreshadows the betrayal of Judas that will come. Indeed, the death of John the Baptist also points to the fact that Jesus will be executed as well. The reality of all that Jesus has come to be and to do, really hits home. Jesus responds not by powering through with toughness, but by taking a step back. The Savior of the world needed a moment to grieve. He needed time to acknowledge what He was feeling. He needed to regroup and recharge. There's a lesson in here for us not to miss.

What did Jesus do with the hurt that he felt? How did Jesus handle the pain of this life? We know from the death of Lazarus, that Jesus was not ashamed to cry in public. We know from several more texts, that Jesus often needed to go off on His own to pray. We know from his intimate prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane that He didn't hold back His feelings, His laments and His concerns, even when He was in earshot of the disciples He was leading.

There is a saying by a pastor I deem to be one of the best in our Presbyterian tradition. He said, "Anything that is human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable, can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary." Of course, that Pastor is none other than the late Rev. Fred Rogers. Yes, I mean Mr. Rogers of Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood. An ordained Teaching Elder or Minister of Word and Sacrament like me in the Presbyterian Church, Mr. Rogers' point here, is very biblical.

You see, Matthew's account and how publishers break up the paragraphs in English, might make it seem like there is no time lapse between Jesus leaving, and the convergence of huge crowds in need of healing, and later food. But remember that the text makes it clear that Jesus goes by boat. Jesus and the disciples cut across the Sea of Galilee, while the crowds that follow walk around the sea.

In the parallel text from the Gospel of Mark, this stands out in a unique way. In Mark's gospel, after hearing of John, Jesus first sends the apostles out to the people and He stays back. In a gospel that so frequently uses terms like "immediately" to speed up the text. Here the gospel writer pauses, showing that Jesus had some alone time, and when the apostles get back, Jesus tells them that they need to rest also. Again, they all left by boat, while the crowds followed on foot. Jesus took time to grieve the death of John, and likely even talk to His disciples about it.

Here the gospel writers do as Rev. Rogers said, they mention what is human about Jesus. And anything that is mentionable is manageable, which makes it less overwhelming. These texts show us that to deal with grief, Jesus needed some time alone. Rather than just keep going, Jesus takes the time, we can safely assume, to pray and talk about His feelings, perhaps even His apprehension, just as he would do later in the garden where He was betrayed. Also, in Mark's passage, as anyone in ministry or church service at any level knows, the Apostles likely had a lot to think about also, from John's execution to being rejected in their ministry, as they preached the good news of God's Kingdom come.

Indeed, what the writers show us here, is the fullness of who Jesus is as God and human. At first the humanity of Jesus is seen as a preview of what is to come in the final days. Jesus is rejected by His hometown, and then John's death foreshadows His own. But in His unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit, Jesus emerges refreshed, able to take five loaves and two fish and give them to the disciples, so that the disciples could use them to feed 5000, 10,000, maybe 15,000 people.

This is no minor miracle. It is an encapsulation of the whole gospel in one glorious moment. Indeed, just as God shared in our humanity born as Mary's son Jesus in a stable, so, too, Jesus shared in our humanity and our challenges of grief and uncertainty. And just as Jesus died on the cross and rose again to give us new life in Him, so also, Jesus goes away, and re-emerges with healing and life sustaining food. And just as by His death and resurrection the Spirit rests in us and calls us to share this life and love with the world, so too, the bread and fish are given to the disciples, and distributed by them to feed the many gathered.

Friends, what are we to do with the hurt that we feel in these uncertain times? What is a biblical approach to dealing with the loss of things we hold dear? What can we learn from Jesus about grief, from the Apostles, about our trials?

First, it is ok to feel and even grieve a sense of loss, of uncertainty and change, just as Jesus did. It is ok to feel doubt and fear and worry, just as the Apostles did. But we need to be emotionally mature enough and honest enough with God, and with ourselves to recognize these feelings and see where they come from. We can and should do that alone in prayer with Jesus, who knows us. But we can do it also with friends, who like Jesus know us too, and we can also do it with a mental health professional who is trained to help you work through these things.

You don't have to be ashamed to talk about your humanity, because Jesus shared in it. And if it is mentionable, then bring it to God, and bring it to a friend or a professional, to help you manage your feelings, by recognizing them and how they affect you. This makes our feelings less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary.

Rather than being like my 2-year old, you and I must look beneath the anger we feel, and look beneath frustrations and sadness too, all of which are merely symptoms of larger issues. We must take the time to understand our feelings, even grieve our loss, because to do so will empower us to share in God's work, which is to reconcile all things in Christ.

Yes, if our feelings are less overwhelming or upsetting and less scary, look what can happen. After taking some time, Jesus was ready to return to His work of compassion. Being in touch with your feelings, as the Rev. Mr. Rogers taught so many children, is not a sign of your weakness, but a reflection of your spiritual maturity.

Do not be afraid to be honest with God because God really doesn't expect you to be God. No, you are called to receive Jesus as your Lord. Yes, Jesus, who came down to share in your life, to die and rise for you – for you to receive new life abundant and eternal by God's love and forgiveness.

Do not try to justify anger or hate or judgement, being unable to forgive the sins of others. Instead find the root of the hurt that you feel within you and address it with God. Let Jesus empower you to forgive as you have been forgiven by Him. This will lead you and I, all of us, to turn to Him. This is what repentance truly is. So, through Jesus, together, you and I, all of us can help make this world a better place. Amen.

# Word Search Puzzle

from WhenWeWordSearch.com (use for free distribution only)  
words in a straight line left to right or top to bottom



Words in the puzzle are printed in ***bold italics***.

Matthew 14:13-21 (Pastor's Translation)ate After ***hearing*** that ***John*** the ***Baptist*** had been executed by ***Herod***, Jesus withdrew from there by boat to a secluded ***place*** to be by himself. And having ***heard*** that he ***withdrew***, crowds from the towns followed him. And having gone out to him, Jesus saw a great ***crowd*** and was ***moved*** with ***compassion*** toward them, and healed the ***sick*** among them. When ***evening*** had come, the disciples came to him saying, 'This is a ***secluded*** place and after all of this ***waiting, time*** has gone by us. ***Dismiss*** the crowds, in ***order*** that they might go into the villages and ***buy food*** for themselves.' And ***Jesus*** said to them, 'They do not have to go away. You ***give*** them something to ***eat***.' But they said to him, We have nothing here, if not for these five loaves and two ***fish***.' And he said, '***Bring*** them here to me.' And having ***directed*** the crowds to ***sit*** down on the ***grass***, then taking the five loaves and two fish and looking up to ***heaven***, he ***blessed*** them, and ***breaking*** them, he gave the loaves to the disciples. The disciples ***gave*** them to the crowds, and all ***ate*** and were ***satisfied***. Then they took up the fragments that were ***left*** over, ***twelve*** baskets ***filled***. Those who ate were 5,000 men, plus women and ***children***.