

Sermon August 2, 2026

Matthew 14:13-21

Now when Jesus heard 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. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.

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.

Blessing at the Breaking Point

When you are in the presence of God, you are changed forever! Jacob met God in the wilderness. They wrestled all night long, but he left with a blessing and a lifelong limp. People gathered on a mountain craving crumbs of wisdom, but they returned home filled with the Bread of Life that filled them body and soul.

When you are in the presence of God, you are changed forever!

But the reality is that we spend most of our lives oblivious to God's presence in our day to lives. We do not need the mountaintop or the darkness of the wilderness to encounter God. There are moments in life when everything

feels like it is pressing in at once— when the past catches up, when the future feels uncertain, when the present feels too heavy to carry.

Jacob stands alone at the riverbank, the weight of his past bearing down on him, the fear of his brother ahead of him, and the night stretching long around him. Jacob has spent his life running... from conflict, from consequences, from the truth.

But rivers have a way of slowing us down. Night has a way of revealing what daylight lets us avoid. And sometimes God meets us in the very place we hoped to escape.

Jacob wrestles all night with something he cannot overpower and something that will not let him go. Transformation begins with struggle, with a long night of wrestling. We only receive clarity when we look back and see how far we have come. And when the stranger touches Jacob's hip, Jacob is wounded. Blessing and wounding arrive together.

Jacob limps into the dawn. He is not defeated, but he is changed forever. He receives a new name: Israel: "the one who wrestles with God."

His limp becomes a testimony that God meets us in struggle, that blessing can come through wounding. We are transformed into who God calls us to become.

And our woundedness comes in many forms. Jacob is wounded in the struggle and will walk with a limp for the rest of his life. His wound is a physical reminder of where he has gone and who he has become. Jesus' wounds are hidden deep inside his soul. He has just learned of John the Baptist's death. Luk tells us they are cousins... they are certainly friends who share a common prophetic vision. John creates the path for Jesus' ministry. Jesus withdraws to a deserted place, seeking solitude, seeking space to grieve.

But, of course, the crowds follow. Thousands of them. Hungry. Hurting. Hopeful. Bearing their own wounds... standing on the brink of a breaking point.

Jesus could have sent them away. But he chooses a better path. We are told that he has compassion for the people who have gathered. He spends hours

healing and praying... depleting himself even more. Setting aside his pain and weariness.

He sees the crowd not as a burden but as beloved. They feed his soul and help ease the pain of his hidden wounds of grief.

The disciples look at the crowd and all they see scarcity: "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish."

"Bring them here to me."

In his hands, scarcity becomes abundance; fear becomes generosity. The crowd becomes a community.

Everyone eats. Everyone is filled. And there are baskets left over— more than enough to go around.

Today we are reminded of a sacred truth: whether we are alone in the wilderness or surrounded by a crowd of strangers, God meets us at the breaking point... and then God transforms our woundedness into blessing. The breaking point might be as we face an unexpected new chance in the dead of night or watch scarcity become abundance.

God does not wait for us to be strong, or certain, or unafraid. God meets us in the struggle. God meets us in the hunger. God meets us in the grief. And God brings blessing out of what feels impossible.

Maybe you are wrestling with something you cannot overpower. It wakes you up in the dead of night, and as you wrestle with the fear or memory, you find yourself face-to-face with the truth you tried to avoid.

Maybe you are surrounded by a crowd of needs: family, community, work, the world all pressing against you and depleting your strength. You feel like you have nothing but a handful to share and there is not enough to go around.

Whether you are limping, grieving, or overwhelmed by the need around you, remember that you are not alone. Jacob limped home a changed man... the crowds were changed because Jesus didn't just share their pain... he fed them. And the disciples are changed too. Nourished and refreshed, they are no longer weary. They are ready to go out again and work to make God's

plan a reality. And they bear with them the leftover bread that will sustain them on their journey.

We have inherited the leftovers. We share them whenever we gather around the table... whenever we remember. In this place, our bodies and spirits rest and we receive nourishment and refreshment... we receive blessings at our breaking points.

These stories tell us that God is not absent at the breaking point. God is present in them. And no one can be in the presence of God and not be changed forever.

Thanks be to God. Amen.