

THE FOLLOWING IS THE SCRIPT THAT PASTOR STEVE USED TO PREACH FROM. IT IS NOT WRITTEN FOR PUBLICATION, AND MAY CONTAIN TYPOS AND/OR GRAMMATICAL ERRORS. IT MAY ALSO DIFFER SLIGHTLY FROM THE RECORDED SERMON.

Sermon 2 August 2020

Title: Broken Pieces (Matthew 14:13-21)

- Good morning church! It is a good day to gather together in this virtual space—I trust you have had a good week and you’ve been able to get out and enjoy some of this warm weather we’ve been blessed with recently. I know a lot of other people certainly have—our flat looks out at the ferry and I have never seen so many people, in their cars and on foot, in the queue to get over to Cumbrae—I suppose things are opening up over there just like they are here, so there’s no danger that the crowds of people will get there and not find any place to eat, I don’t guess—
- But that is what happens in Chapter 14 of Matthew’s gospel, in the scripture that Pastor Tasha shared with us, and this morning we’re going to look at that very familiar story of the feeding of the 5,000—
- This is an event that all four of the gospel writers give us the details of. You can find it in the gospel of Mark in chapter 6:31-44; in the gospel of Luke 9:12-17; in the gospel of John 6:1-14).
- But in Matthew’s gospel, the narrative of the feeding of the 5,000 is found in chapter 14, beginning with verse 13. And verse 13 begins like this:

- Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat—here in verse 13 we have joined Matthew in the middle of a story that began back in verse 1 of chapter 14.
- And so we of course immediately ask, What did Jesus hear? Now if we back up to verse 1, we'll know what Jesus heard, and we'll see that Matthew plays with time a little bit here in these verses, so it can get a little confusing, but if you take a minute to think about what's happening when, you'll be able to keep it straight.
- Matthew writes in verses 1-12, these are also in your service notes, that Herod, the ruler, heard about what Jesus was doing—we first hear the NAME of King Herod in the beginning of Matthew's gospel, when he tries to use the three wise men to lead him to the Messiah, and then he has all the baby boys around Bethlehem killed—he's a real piece of work; not the nicest guy at all—but this King Herod is his SON, who rules over Galilee--and so at this point in Matthew's gospel, Jesus has been baptised by John the Baptist, and he's been tempted in the wilderness, and he's chosen his disciples, and he's been going around the country teaching and preaching and telling parables and healing people and casting out demons, that kind of thing—and so Herod hears reports about what Jesus is doing, and he tells his servants that he thinks John the Baptist has come back from the dead, and is working through this one they call Jesus. And he's sort of on the right track, because it certainly is the same power that was at work in John the Baptist that is at work in Jesus, but he's incorrect about John being resurrected—but by mentioning

being raised from the dead, Matthew gives us a little glimpse, a little foreshadowing, of what's coming later in his gospel.

- But we get the idea that what's going on in Herod's mind has to do with a guilty conscience, maybe he's feeling some conviction, that perhaps like the pounding of the Tell-tale heart in Edgar Allen Poe's short story, John's prophetic voice haunts Herod in death just as it had done in life, rebuking and reminding him, and calling him to repentance for the evil he has done.
- And Matthew tells us about one thing that Herod has done in the next few verses.
- Now Herod had married his brother's wife. His brother's name was Phillip, and his wife's name was Herodias. And John the Baptist had reprimanded Herod for doing that—Matthew tells us here in verse 4 that John had been telling him "It is not lawful for you to have her." Luke, in chapter 3 of his gospel—and we've talked about this before--says that when John the Baptist rebuked Herod for stealing his brother's wife AND all the other evil things he had done, Herod locked him up in prison.
- Now Matthew tells us that Herod WANTED to put John to death, but he was scared of the people—the population—all the folks who considered John to be a prophet. And so he just locks him up.
- So, while John was locked up in prison, Herod's birthday comes around—now some scholars think it might have been the anniversary of his becoming king, but others think it was his actual birthday—but anyway, on that day of celebration Herod threw a big party, a banquet, a feast for his invited guests,

and at that banquet Matthew tells us that Herodias' daughter "danced before the company"—now she would have been Herod's stepdaughter; her mother is Herodias (Herod's stolen wife), her Dad is Herod's brother Phillip—and her name is Salome—Matthew doesn't tell us that, but we can get that information from other historians.

- And when we read those words today, "she danced before the company," we might just sort of run right over them, but the kind of dancing that would have been going on at a party like Herod's would not have been, let's say "wholesome." In fact, it would have been the kind of dancing that most of Matthew's Jewish audience would have found offensive and vulgar and, well, sinful—but even to Herod's circle of friends, the idea that a member of the royal family would do such a dance—for the people there AND for her stepfather would have been SCANDALOUS. Imagine Princess Anne doing a burlesque routine at the Queen's birthday celebration and you'll get the idea of what a spectacle this would have been.
- But Herod is not offended—in fact he is pleased—he likes what he sees—and this gives us some insight into his personality—remember he is the kind of ruler who will take any woman he wants—even his brother's wife—and so, in his lustful frenzy he tells Salome that he'll give her anything she wants. This is also his chance to show-off in front of his guests—to show them he has the power to grant any request she might make.
- And so Salome's mother Herodias whispers in her ear, because this is Herodias' chance to get something she's wanted for some time—and so

Salome says “bring me the head of John the Baptist on a platter”— she wants it put down on the table in front of her like it’s some sort of dish to be served—like it’s dessert at this banquet. Cut me off a big piece of John the Baptist and serve it up, she says.

- It’s at that point that Herod remembers his fear of the people, and Matthew tells us he’s grieved, but he swore an oath in front of the whole company of people, so he couldn’t back out. He’s in an uncomfortable position. He has no choice.
- So he orders that John be beheaded, right then, and his head is brought on a platter and placed before Salome who gives it to her mother, Herodias.
- Now Matthew has painted a gruesome, terrifying picture of decadence and debauchery and disregard for life here in these few verses.
- But what I want to suggest is that Matthew has also painted a picture of the way that several powerful forces work, the way that power can be used to affect other people, to achieve certain ends, to satisfy desires
- Matthew has told us of the way that Herod used his imperial power to arrest John and to throw him in prison—but Herod doesn’t put John to death even though he WANTS to because he is afraid of what the people think of John—so the power of public opinion restricts his actions and prevents him from executing John.
- But then at Herod’s birthday banquet, Herodias uses the powers that she has at her disposal, the power of the parent, the power of persuasion, to convince her daughter to use her body, and her beauty, and her sensuality, to use the

power of the temptations of the flesh, the power of seduction, to lead Herod into a state in which he'd promise her anything—and he does.

- And then because he's made this boast in front of an audience, the power of fear of damaging his own reputation drives him to display his power to Salome and the whole company, demonstrating that he DOES possess the power to meet her request. Herod exercises the power he holds to bring terror, to end life, the power to kill and to satisfy Herodias' appetite for destruction.
- And so into the middle of this feast, this banquet, this corrupt celebration of wealth and opulence and carnal delights, Herod brings death on a silver platter. Because he is a powerful ruler.
- But at the end of this story about a ruler who wields earthly power, who is influenced by the forces of pride and greed and lust and fear, who fulfills the desires of the bloodthirsty in an attempt to silence the voice of a prophet, at the end of this story, Matthew tells a story about another kind of ruler, and another kind of power, and another kind of banquet in another kind of place among another kind of people.
- And so Matthew sets up an opportunity to contrast these two rulers, these two leaders, these two kings of men, and the contrast could not be more stark, because while
- Herod brings death and destruction to a place of wealth and abundance, Jesus brings life and abundance to a place of need and scarcity.

- Matthew tells us in verse 12 that John’s disciples collect John’s headless body and bury it, and then tell Jesus what had happened. We don’t know what happened to the other piece of the corpse.
- And that brings us to where we began—when Jesus heard this he got in a boat and went off by himself, out into the middle of nowhere—into a deserted place—the Greek there lets us know that this was an uncultivated and unpopulated place, a deserted and solitary place, a place where Jesus could have some of what Pastor Tasha and I call “alone time” to think and to pray and to meditate and to rest
- And I want to remind you this morning, and this is a reminder for me too, that if Jesus needed to take time for himself, by himself, to recharge his batteries, so to speak, how much more do each of us need to make sure to take care of ourselves—our mental and spiritual health—because down-time is important—if we don’t make time to take a break every now and then when we need to, then life has a way of making us take time—of breaking us in order to remind us that we are only human—we may be empowered by the very breath of the Spirit of God, but we need to make time to breathe on occasion—to take a breath—to catch our breath before we start off again
- And this is what we find Jesus doing in verse 13. And it should not be surprising that he would need to do so. He had just heard the horrific details of the violent death of his friend John--who had Baptised him, who had prepared the way for him, a man Jesus calls in Matthew chapter 11 “a prophet and more than a prophet. . .he is Elijah who is to come”--- Jesus says

of John the Baptist that among those born of women no one has arisen greater than him—and Luke spends the first chapter of his gospel detailing how intimately Jesus and John the Baptist were connected even before birth, how closely tied to each other even their mothers were.

- So the death, the gruesome, humiliating death of John the Baptist must have shaken Jesus to his core, and surely must have been a reminder of the violent demise that a prophet could expect to meet, a reminder that his time on this earth was limited, a reminder that the power of the state and of the principalities of this earth would one day rise up and strike him down as well.
- So Jesus had a lot to think about, and to pray about out there in that boat.
- And considering the fact that Herod believed that Jesus was the resurrected John the Baptist, who Herod had already killed once, and would surely not hesitate to cut into pieces again, it would have been understandable if Jesus had decided to flee to safety, to escape perhaps to another country, like Egypt, as his parents had done when he was just a defenseless newborn.
- But that is not what happens.
- Matthew tells us that the crowds of people who had been following Jesus hear about where he is, and they show up on the shore in that desolate place, and that when he comes ashore Jesus has compassion on them, he sees that they are in need, and he cures the sick among them.
- And it's here that we find the miracle that all four of the gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, write about.

- Matthew tells us that evening had come—and in Matthew’s gospel, that’s a signal that something is about to happen
- Matthew 8:16 tells us, “When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick”
- Matthew tells us that evening has come just before Jesus walks on the water a little further on here in Chapter 14, and
- In chapter 27, Matthew tells us that as Jesus hung upon the cross, even at 3:00 in the afternoon, darkness fell upon all the land—evening came
- And when evening comes, God’s about to demonstrate his power over the darkness
- And that’s what happens here in Chapter 14.
- Evening had come.
- And so the disciples approach Jesus, and as is always SUCH a good idea, they tell him what to do. They give him some direction, some advice, they offer him the benefit of their wisdom and insight. (!)
- The disciples say to him, “Listen Jesus, it’s getting late, it’s getting dark, and these people are going to need to get something to eat. And since we are out in the middle of nowhere—there’s not a Tesco or a chippy or even a McDonald’s for miles around—you ought to send everybody on their way back to wherever they came from so they can buy some dinner.”
- Now these would not have been wealthy, well-fed people. These were people who were in need—physical, financial, spiritual—that’s why they followed

Jesus—he offered hope in the midst of poverty and oppression and scarcity and fear.

- And so Jesus carefully considers the advice of his disciples, and he could have said “Well that makes sense—in this place, at this time, it would be prudent to send these folks away and tell them to get their needs met elsewhere. We’re in a rough place, and these people want, even need, what isn’t to be found here.”
- But that’s not what Jesus says. And he also doesn’t say, “Thank you for bringing this to my attention. I’ll handle this for you.” No, Jesus says, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.”
- You do it. Jesus has just told his disciples in chapter 10 that he’s sending them out with the power to heal and raise the dead and cleanse the lepers—and here they are, ready to send this massive crowd on their way because they’re hungry.
- You do it, Jesus says. “You give them something to eat.”
- The disciples’ reply is predictable—“we have NOTHING here but five loaves and two fish.’
- The disciples are saying to Jesus, “You must not understand the situation, Jesus. There are thousands of people here in need, and we are in a place where there are no providers, and our resources are not sufficient to even begin to meet these needs. Now, maybe if we were in another place, in another time, with better resources, now THEN we might think about

tackling this problem, but as things are, we just need to send these folks elsewhere. We have NOTHING, but. . .”

- And it’s right there that disciples begin to understand what they are called to do. They don’t say “we have nothing”—they say “we have nothing but five loaves and two fish.” They look at what they DO have. With honesty and clarity. And it ain’t much, but it ain’t nothing.
- And what does Jesus say about those five loaves and two fish? “Bring them here to me.”
- Just as Salome said “bring me the broken body of John the Baptist,” Jesus says, “bring me those loaves and fishes,” and Jesus takes the loaves, bread that will in time symbolise his own body broken for the salvation of the world, and he breaks them, and blesses them and the fish, and –notice this, it’s important—gives them back to the disciples who give them to the crowd.
- This miracle is sometimes referred to as JESUS’ Feeding the Five Thousand, but that’s not quite right—because it’s the disciples who feed the crowd—it’s the disciples that Jesus tells “you give them something to eat,” and it is the disciples who give what they have to Jesus and then find it more than sufficient to meet every need in abundance.
- And every person in that great crowd of thousands eats and is filled—not just given enough to get by, but FILLED, and the leftovers—**the broken pieces--** fill twelve baskets—one for every one of the disciples—one for every one of the tribes of Israel—and so it makes sense that this miracle, with its Jewish audience, is repeated in Gentile territory in chapter 15, with seven baskets of

leftovers—seven, the number of completion—and so Matthew tells us that Jesus the bread of life has come, broken not just for Israel but for all the world.

- In these two stories in Matthew’s gospel we see the contrast between two powerful rulers. One earthly ruler who acts out of self-interest, driven by worldly appetites and motivations—who deals in violence and corruption. But another, the heavenly ruler on earth, who meets the needs of others through his disciples, who transforms scarcity into abundance. Herod had the power to eliminate, to break the body, to bring death and fear, but Jesus has the power to multiply, to distribute life by way of the broken body, to conquer fear and even death itself.
- Back in January of this year, our church board—Alison, Carol, Pastor Norman, Ron, Pastor Tasha and I—held our 2020 vision meeting to assess where the church was heading, and how we could best focus our efforts in the year ahead. We asked what resources we had, and where we were as a church, and what we did best, and what we needed to do more of.
- And one of the things that we concluded that Largs Church of the Nazarene does really well is what we called hospitality, and in our vision statement, we said that hospitality entails providing a welcoming safe space and fellowship at the Lord’s table.
- And we confirmed that Largs COTN has a long history of doing hospitality really well, stretching back for years it has been one of the church’s strengths, and part of the reason for that was the church’s resources—we

have a nice, clean, welcoming church building with chairs and tables and an inspected and certified kitchen, all the equipment we need to prepare and serve meals and have gatherings, and we have people who are well-trained, and talented, and faithful and giving, who are willing to take the time to make others feel welcome, and so we were all comforted by the assurance that the church was in a good place, in a good position and well-outfitted—we had what we needed to serve the needs of the people in our community.

- It was shortly after that when we received the shocking news of the death of our dear brother Ron, a member of the board and faithful servant who had been so instrumental in preparing the way forward. And like Jesus in that boat we all had to take some time to grieve, to meditate, to come to terms with our loss.
- But the people in our community still had needs, and we were still called to be the church and to meet those needs.
- It was not long after that the lockdown started. And the church found ourselves in unprecedented times, in uncharted territory. We had to lock the church doors. We had no kitchen, no equipment, no table, no place to gather, no fellowship as we had known it, our people couldn't visit as they could before. We couldn't have our Sunday services or Bible study or prayer meetings together.
- But the people in our community still had needs—the need for physical nourishment, for emotional and spiritual nourishment—and even moreso in

this time of hardship—people had lost jobs and their kids were at home all the time and they faced all sorts of new challenges.

- And as a church, we could have said, well, people are just going to have to go somewhere else to get fed—in this place, at this time, it would be prudent to send these folks away and tell them to get their needs met elsewhere. We're in a rough place, and these people want, even need, what isn't to be found here.
- But Jesus said "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."
- But compared to the resources we had in January, we had nothing—no building, no kitchen, no tables and chairs, no way to gather with people and have fellowship—we had nothing, but
- We had people who knew how to pray, and to pick up a telephone, and to write an email or a text or a letter
- We had technology that allowed us to communicate and to interact with others. We had a website where we shared the gospel.
- We had a local food bank and we had people who knew how to cook and to bake and to deliver meals that would provide nourishment and comfort and show the love of Jesus to others
- We had people who wanted to give and to support the mission of the church
- And we had local restaurants and grocery stores who were ready to make donations

- And when we looked at what we DID have, we realised that it wasn't all that we had back in January, but it wasn't nothing—we had some resources, but compared to the need, maybe they didn't seem like they'd be enough
- But Jesus said, "Bring them here to me."
- And the powerful heavenly ruler who meets the needs of others through his disciples, who transforms scarcity into abundance, took those resources and multiplied them, and our church family and the people of our community are being fed physically, emotionally, and spiritually in more ways than we ever imagined would be possible, and we've got baskets of leftovers ready to be distributed next week and the week after that and the week after that.
- And that hasn't just happened at our church. It's happened at churches all over the district, all over the country, all over the world, churches who didn't look at what they didn't have, they looked at what they HAD, and they gave it to Jesus, who multiplied it
- And the same is true for us as individuals—don't dwell on your losses, don't look around and say, "Boy we're in the middle of nowhere, and we've got nothing to give to others"--Focus on what you DO have, no matter how insignificant you may think it is—even if it seems like nothing to you—bring your resources, your gifts, your talents, your time, your faith, your life—bring it to Jesus and you'll see it multiplied and given back to you to give to others—and there'll be an abundance left over, too. Amen.
- Next week we're starting a brand new sermon series. It's going to be fun—a little bit different maybe than what you're used to, but I think you'll find it

edifying, and I think you'll be fed spiritually by it. We'll be announcing it this week, so watch for that, and we'll also be announcing a new way of doing our Bible Study that will happen now that Big Faith has ended.

- May the Lord bless you today and bring us safely back together again next time—tell somebody about the good news of the gospel today—use words if necessary.