The circumstances told in this gospel passage today takes place just after Jesus hears the news of the murder of John the Baptist.

Jesus withdrew by boat to a deserted place. Luke- Jesus went to a lonely place - to pray, to be by himself. More than self-care – a place of mourning and grief. Seeking solace in the presence of Abba, Father.

But when Jesus arrives, there are crowds that have gone ahead of him. Men, women and children. People who have walked or been carried to this lonely, deserted place; this wilderness.

And we might know those places too. Places on the borders of our everyday lives, where needs are exposed, feelings can be released in cries and tears. A place apart from the ordinary day to day of holding it together, where we might break open and be healed.

Here is where Jesus meets them, meets us. Despite his own need, Jesus responds with compassion, with deep, sympathy for their need. He heals, touches them. He moves among them, he knows them. In this wilderness God is not absent.

This is a place of miracles.

Miracle… Volumes written about this “feeding of the 5,000”. Only story found in all four gospels.

Miracles are great fodder for debate. Some flatly deny (Jefferson), others vehemently defend. Easy to get caught up in the debate of “did this happen?’” and “how can we explain this?” kind of analysis.

* Jesus *multiplies* the loaves and fish – a miracle of multiplication
* The Spirit moves through the community and more is given from what was already there and not previously revealed – a miracle of sharing

Perhaps on this occasion we can resign from the debating society for the moment.

The word miracle comes from Mirari (middle English) – “a wonder”, the unexpected, something to behold, that takes us by surprise. Let’s pay attention to where there is wonder in this telling.

Jesus heals the people all throughout the day, and despite the reality that dusk is upon them, the people are not looking to leave. They want to stay with Jesus. Even in the midst of his own deep hurt, he brings holy salve to heal the people. Why would they leave him?

The disciples become increasingly worried. “Send these people away”, they tell Jesus. “Let them go and find something to eat.”

Perhaps they fear that the crowd in their eventual physical hunger, will become restless, anxious, *(as they are),* and become unruly. And maybe their fretting is not completely unfounded.

It is a time that has become increasingly familiar to us, when those vulnerabilities/cracks in our systems, now stressed to the breaking point, finally fracture, and completely fall apart. People grow tired of pointing to where the cracks are, to always having to keep a finger in the dike. Tired of subsisting spiritually, mentally and physically on waning hope and promises unfulfilled.

We can see it in the long lines at food pantries and overwhelmed social service agencies. No longer nameless people in need. Families, we talked of being “on the margins” and “one paycheck away from bankruptcy” are revealed as the people living right next door to us.

Send them away…we don’t have the resources…there isn’t enough…let them find something to eat somewhere else.

Jesus is the model for non-anxious presence. “No, I will not send these people away. You give them something to eat.”

Perhaps Jesus was looking to see where his disciples would look for an answer. After all, it was just a few verses earlier that they assured Jesus they completely understood his parables?

Would they focus on what wasn’t there or ……..on what was, ……..or even think about who was there? As long as we look through a clouded lens of what is not possible by the numbers, out of fear, out of anxiety, we may never realize the outlandish possibility of a world with enough to go around.

*What the disciples didn’t take into account was that they needed to factor Jesus into the equation.*

*“The problem is not a lack of fish, but a lack of vision. The abundance of God’s presence is hidden in plain view and often obscured by the illusion of scarcity. Abundance is less a resource to be counted and more an interior quality, a presence, a way of being and seeing.”* (Michael Marsh)

Marks’ version – “go and see”. And fish and loaves are found.

And now we have the miracle that is so familiar to us – *taking, thanking, breaking, and giving*. That which is ordinary, becomes a wonder.

But **I** wonder, what if we didn't know this story? What is the ending was a complete mystery? What would we expect to happen if we are hearing this for the first time?

5,000 men, plus women and children. Some argue as many as 15,000 people. Almost larger than all of the communities in the Galilee region.

John, prophet and teacher, has been murdered by Herod, a puppet of Rome, over some whim that takes place at a drunken gathering. The people are angry, dispirited, horrified, over his death. This might just be the straw that breaks the camel’s back.

And Jesus is there with the crowd, they follow him to desolate places to hear this revolutionary voice preaching of the coming of a new kingdom. The people have come, to this lonely place, so dissatisfied with the status quo, that they have come to hear something else…. to hear some good news.

This has the all potential of revolution, the rebel alliance gathering to cast off Herod, to resist the tyranny of Rome. The army is assembled. 5,000 men could do some major damage in the region. And there are likely zealots among them, looking for Jesus to be just that – a zealous revolutionary leader, to take the reins of uprising.

The miracle, the wonder is that Jesus does not bring the revolution that we might expect from the depictions of the fiery, charismatic rebel leader depicted in film. Jesus does not offer the people a violent overthrow on that day; instead he offers them a meal.

Unimaginable grace, REVOLUTIONARY GRACE, blessed nourishment and compassion and abundance appear in the midst of the actual scarcity and the denial of personhood these people endure every day.

Jesus reveals to them the very nature of God; not simply a taste of the Kin-dom, but ***God’s lavishness of enough***. This is the miracle, the wonder. This is wondrous communion and a story so worth remembering and telling that it has survived all these years in all four gospels.

This is the promise of the kin-dom, the PRIZE that the late John Lewis charges us to never give up on and to not let out of our sight.

*“Though I may not be here with you, I urge you to answer the highest calling of your heart and stand up for what you truly believe. In my life I have done all I can to demonstrate that the way of peace, the way of love and nonviolence is the more excellent way. Now it is your turn to let freedom ring.”*

This day, we are not only commemorating an event from 2,000 years ago. We are holding ***fresh*** the miraculous hope, and the promise that remains abundantly **NEW**, that is for all time in and through the life, death and wondrous resurrection of Christ Jesus.

I offer an adaptation of a thanksgiving written by Christopher Grundy, Author of *Beloved Commun*ion, and pray we find some measure in our lives on this day as we worship.

*Gracious One, if we have found nourishment for our hungry bodies and our deepest selves, if any of us has sensed your Spirit moving here, …… or has tasted the abundance of your grace, then it is you who have been at work in us and we give you thanks for the miracle of your Beloved Community, always coming near.*

Amen.