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Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA
August 2, 2020
Year A, Proper 13, Revised Common Lectionary, Track 2
[Isaiah 55:1-5](#)
[Psalm 145: 8-9, 15-22](#)
[Romans 9:1-5](#)
[Matthew 14:13-21](#)

The eyes of all wait upon you, O LORD, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, and fill all things living with your abundance. Amen.

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The people were in the wilderness. They were hungry. There wasn't enough to eat. And God fed them anyway.

That sums up the story we just heard. But it sums up another story too, an older one at the heart of the story of God's people Israel. They had escaped from Egypt and were on a long, long journey before they could enter the Promised Land. They were in the wilderness and they were hungry. And God fed them with miraculous food, a kind of stuff they called manna. The psalms call it the bread of angels. Every morning it appeared on the ground like dew from heaven. Everyone got just enough, never too much. If anyone tried to store up leftovers, they rotted away. It was food for the journey: each portion just enough to sustain them through.

"Can God set a table in the wilderness?" one of the psalms asks. And the answer, of course, was yes. And now centuries later as the people flock to Jesus to hear his teaching and receive his healing, God sets a table in the wilderness again. Once again, God makes not-enough into enough for all. One difference is that this time there are leftovers, twelve full baskets, a number that's symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve disciples of Jesus, a number that means *all God's people*. It's as if to say that in Jesus, God is doing the same thing as ever, and God is also doing something new. Once again God is feeding the people in the wilderness. And yet this time, instead of just enough, there's a kind of plenty that overflows, like new wine bursting out of old wineskins, like a single seed producing thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold, like a mustard plant growing wild to cover a whole field.

Here we are gathered together to celebrate Sunday, the Lord's Day, in person for the first time in over four and a half months. And we are still very, very much in the wilderness. And there is also still a joy about this gathering, a kind of abundance and delight. Today's gospel would be perfect for the occasion if we were here to celebrate the Eucharist today. Loaves multiplying in the wilderness to feed God's

people. But—we are not, not yet. For now we are still gathered here to feed on Jesus in a spiritual way, not a sacramental way. To feed on him, as the Prayer Book puts it, in our hearts, by faith.

Now there will come a time soon enough that we'll be sharing the Eucharist again. I hope and trust it'll be in a month or two, and this first gathering is a big step toward that. But even when we do, when we're again a practicing eucharistic community, it'll be under unique conditions. Once a month, not every Sunday. Distant, with many of us unable to be together in person and having the Eucharist brought to them. We'll be sharing the bread only, under our bishop's guidance, saving the cup for a time when it's safer once again. Even once we're celebrating Communion again we will know that this is very much food for a wilderness journey.

And in fact there's a way in which the Eucharist is always that. Even under normal circumstances, the Eucharist is always food for the journey, not the destination in and of itself. It's a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, a kind of appetizer for the full feast to which God's people are invited and that will one day take place, when every single one of those God has redeemed will be gathered in and every tear will be wiped away forever.

I don't want to be too otherworldly here. This is not about pie in the sky by and by. Yes: there is a very real future that we as Christians hope for and believe in. The triumph of God's love throughout the whole universe. And rather than making us neglect the world here and now, that should make us love it even more, because we know what its destiny is. So let's not miss the very physical, tangible implications of this story.

At the beginning of the story, Jesus heals sick people. And at the end, he fills the bellies of hungry people. Right now those two things should resonate with us, with a world groaning under a pandemic and people sick and dying, and with an economic crisis where people are losing jobs and going hungry, where poor people and people of color are suffering way out of proportion, and where this very week has seen many people's extra unemployment relief come to an end.

It might seem as if there's nothing we can do. And indeed there are failures of leadership at very high levels that we personally may not be able to change. But look at what Jesus does. In the wilderness, when not enough resources are available, he starts with what they do have and works from there. He blesses it. He breaks the bread and starts giving it out. He starts with the disciples, and then the disciples spread it to others.

How, in this time of crisis, are we called to be Jesus' disciples? To be fed by him, and in turn, to feed those around us?

This week, and in the weeks and months ahead, we are going to be in the wilderness. Keep your eyes open for what God is doing, and what God may be doing through you. How is God working to make not-enough into enough? And how are you part of that plan?