

Good morning. [Puts on shawl, in character.]

That day was not like this.

Well, two thousand years ago in Palestine, it *was* hot.

But empty like this – no.

There was a multitude of people there. ***I was one of them.***

But the way that account, from Matthew, you just read describes it – with “five thousand men, besides women and children”??

What are we – chopped liver?

And, speaking of chopped liver, we were hungry.

Even in that big crowd, I was lucky enough to have a front row seat to the man Jesus.

I was close enough to see the anguish on his face.

So sad, he had just found out that his cousin John (we knew him as John the Baptist) had died.

And what a horrible death. He was killed by that jerk Herod.

Everyone suspected that Herod had long wanted to get rid of that zealous John by putting him to death.

We were beginning to wonder if Herod might want to get Jesus out of the way too.

But Herod didn't even have the guts to order John killed; he used the ruse of blaming it on his wife and stepdaughter.

It was all so disgusting – putting John's head on a platter at Herod's fancy birthday banquet.

And there we were out in the middle of nowhere, hungry.

Well, we had Jesus with us. Or perhaps I should say that *Jesus had us with him.*

After hearing the tragic news of John's torture and death, Jesus tried to withdraw by himself to a deserted place.

You can't blame him for needing some time after receiving such traumatic news.

But, you can't really blame us either for wanting to be with Jesus.

Even in his darkest moments, being with Jesus makes me feel *more alive* than anyone else I've ever met.

Now when Jesus saw that big crowd gathering, he didn't shoo us away.  
That account you read describes it well.  
It said, he had *compassion* for us.  
Compassion: with passion. Literally, *to suffer together*.  
Jesus wasn't above sharing our suffering, sharing his life with us.  
I guess that's what made you feel so alive in his presence.  
It was almost as if you were living in him, and he in you.

But that day he did seem a bit more intense.  
Could it be that his own sense of loss made him even more in tune with ours?  
Could it be that he was showing that we don't need to fear  
or hide our vulnerabilities,  
because God can use even our weakness, our hurts, for good?  
To help others like Jesus helps us?

Because Jesus did help us.  
He put his compassion into action. He cured our sick.  
Then, after a long day,  
when the disciples were ready to send us all away to fend for ourselves,  
Jesus told them that we were all sticking together.  
Jesus told them that they could put compassion into action as he had.  
"You give them something to eat," Jesus told the disciples.

And of course they did what I (and maybe you) would've done –  
concentrated on what they didn't have,  
on how inadequate they felt to the task.

They forgot they were with Jesus.

I didn't have a perfect view of his face right then,  
but I can almost see Jesus rolling his eyes as he tells the disciples  
to bring him whatever they have.  
So they gave Jesus their all,  
they gave him their five loaves and two fish.  
Jesus looked up and beyond the demands of the moment,  
he looked up to heaven.  
And suddenly it was like that mustard seed,  
the leaven, the buried treasure,  
you may have heard Jesus mention last week

when he was talking about the kingdom of heaven.

Now he's showing -- not telling -- but really showing what the kingdom of heaven is like.

And as the disciples watch Jesus bless and break their bread, they begin to see that that's where they are, even now.

A place with Jesus where they have everything they need.

More than they thought possible. Abundance. *Simple, abundance.*

That's life in the kingdom of heaven.

That's the life of compassion in action that Jesus lives, that he empowered the disciples to live back on that desolate hillside.

That's the life of compassion in action that Jesus lives in you today.

I gather you're going through some difficult and uncertain days.

I was hoping to see you filling this great space this morning, but it wasn't to be.

Instead I'm doing just what Jesus taught me on the hillside so long ago;

I'm making do with what I've got, trusting that in Jesus

it will be amplified, *multiplied.*

Right at this moment it seems like I'm not talking to anyone, but I'm talking to you, aren't I?

Maybe Jesus is talking to you through me.

Even me -- a woman so insignificant as to not be counted in that multitude.

But Jesus sent me here today. And he's with you wherever you are.

To assure you that God can use you -- broken hearts, warts and all.

God in Christ can work with and through your brokenness,

your vulnerabilities.

You're here to practice compassion, to suffer with one another.

And to put that compassion into action, using whatever you got,

knowing that *you're offering it to Jesus himself,*

and that in, with and through Jesus,

it's plenty.

Plenty.

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