

SUNDAY, May5, 2024 "Running out of Everything- Jesus Provides"

Luke 10:25-37, John 15:9-17 Matthew 14:13-21

How many of you have got up from the couch in your home and walked to the kitchen in search of something to eat or drink and opened the fridge door to see this? Running on empty. What did you do? In today's world it is easy to order in, drive for a pick up order, or even just go back to the couch or lay down and say it is too much work. The fridge is empty and so are you! There is no energy, no desire to cook anything and you are tired, tired of thinking about the effort you would have to put in to making something to eat. Tired of not knowing what you want or need or desire. Or just tired because of many other situations that you are aware of but cannot change or do. For you have limitations- financial, physical, and mental concerns and you feel empty- like a fridge. The Refrigerator's purpose is to hold food and to keep it cold and fresh but when there is nothing inside it cannot function properly and gets too cold.

This might even be the case with individuals- a sense of emptiness or loss of purpose and this sense or loss is what are focus is today in light of Jesus miracles of providing for others. This is Mental Health Sunday and marks the beginning of Mental Health Week here in Canada. This year's theme is "A call to be kind, because compassion connects us all." Compassion-this is the heart of what matters to people not only in need of mental health care, but being cared for overall.

This is the basis of Jesus parable of the Good Samaritan as shared from Luke 10. A lawyer listening to Jesus wanted to test him and so asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus' response was a question of what the man knew as it is written in the law. The lawyer responded, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbour as yourself." Jesus said, "This is the right answer do this and you will live. But the man asked further, "Who is my neighbour?"

Jesus tells the story of a man who is travelling between Jerusalem and Jericho and is robbed. He is also stripped, beaten and left half dead. A priest goes by, sees the man on the side of the road and passes by on the other side of the road. So too, a Levite also passes him by on the other side. But a third person a Samaritan saw him and was moved with pity—some translations state 'compassion' He goes to the man, bandages his wounds after anointing them with oil and wine. He then lifts him up onto his own animal, takes him to the closest inn and takes care of him. The next day he takes out more money to pay the innkeeper to look after him.

He tells him that when he returns he will repay him for any further expenses. Jesus then asks the man, which one of the three people was a neighbour? The answer was the one who showed him mercy. Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

This parable teaches many things about caring for others—the man is hurt on the side of the road. The Samaritan stops his travel plans, cleans and wraps up the wounded man, puts him on the animal he was riding and takes him to a place where he can get rest and heal. He does this at his own expense, and pays an innkeeper even more money to assist. He shows compassion and mercy. The man who was robbed did not say anything but only 'fell among robbers'- we don't know the extent of his physical injuries- he was left half dead. But what else had occurred to him and why? The parable does not say so but it is the man who responds to the needs of a human being. We don't know if the injured man was unconscious, suffering a concussion, delusional, coherent or anything. But he was tended to out of pity, compassion and mercy.

How often are you tending to another person out of compassion, mercy and pity? Or maybe today you are placing yourself on the side of the road as the one in need. Who will stop for you? This is not an easy answer because in today's world, many people would not stop because they seek a 'what's in it for me attitude' rather than what might I do to help. There may also be fear of what might happen if this person does not want to be helped. This is often the situation with people who are searching for something or someone and does not know where to turn for help.

Our reading Matthew 14 is not a parable teaching of Jesus but one of action. The disciples and Jesus had just learned of John the Baptist's death and he withdrew from them in a boat to be alone. But when the crowds hear that he was out on the boat, they followed him on the shore from the towns. Eventually, Jesus went ashore, saw a great crowd and he had compassion for them and cured the sick. Later in the day the disciples came to him and told Jesus to send the crowd home so they would buy food for themselves. But Jesus told them that they did not need to do this. Jesus told them to feed the people. They had only 5 loaves and 2 fish. Then Jesus took charge. He told the people to sit down on the grass. He took the bread and fish in hand, looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves giving this to the disciples. The disciples then distributed the food to the crowd and everyone ate until they were full. The leftovers were brought to Jesus, 12 baskets in all. Those who had eaten counted @5000 men + women and children.

Jesus' "fridge" was empty that day on many accounts. He was grieving the death of his cousin, John the Baptist. He had withdrawn from everyone by going out on the lake alone but the crowds started to form away from villages and in a deserted area. He was mourning, tired, needing to be alone and in some ways was down – depressed- facing a mental illness. Yet when he felt a little better- he went ashore and healed the people because of his compassion for them. But he wasn't done until he fed them all with 5 loaves and 2 fish. And this is when Jesus' miracle occurs- he took the bread and fish, blesses them by looking to heaven and then breaks it all up. The disciples distribute to everyone. He was down mentally as he grieved but was able to physically nurture all present through a miracle. The people were full and after this he told the people to go home.

In these readings we realize that mental health is a part of everyone's life and it involves the way one sees yourself, others, the world, with God being congruent with reality. One is able to think clearly and even though you have access to a wide range of emotions one is not being swallowed up by them. Jesus was able to sit alone without distraction, did not fall into anxiety, depression or despair. But the opposite—he experienced human emotions and acted out of compassion, mercy and love to help those who were in need. He taught the foundations of self-care by example yet also showed to others that believing in God helps as one walks this journey we call life.

Mental illness is not correlated to having or not having faith in God. It is a separate part of one's being—for we are all physical and spiritual beings able to express emotions but also to mentally understand and comprehend. So when one is experiencing a mental illness one may turn to God as a companion on the journey toward mental wellness.

Mental illnesses or disorders involve significant disturbances in thinking, emotional regulation, or behaviour. There are over 200 types of mental health disorders which affect mood (depression or bipolar), anxiety, personality and psychotic disorders including schizophrenia and these may overlap. Today there are also many effective and different treatment options as well. Since 2019 there has been an increase in the number of people experiencing illnesses of this nature due to outside influences of isolation and anxiety around the pandemic and the redefinition of life post Covid not only in Canada, but around the world. The World Health Organization implemented their Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan in 2013 and in the years leading to 2030 their role is to help in the essential role of mental health for all people.

The plan includes 4 major objectives:

- to strengthen effective leadership and governance for mental health;
- to provide comprehensive, integrated and responsive mental health and social care services in community-based settings;
- to implement of strategies for promotion and prevention in mental health; and
- to strengthen information systems, evidence, and research for mental health.

These objectives are slowly coming into play but it takes time.

But what does this mean for us as people of faith? We need to be aware of mental health issues as we greet and learn to love each other in Jesus' name. As a minister trained in trauma informed grief and anxiety as well as other bereavement strategies, it is essential to enable those within the church to know that taking care of one self mentally is a strategic plan to overall attitude and life.

Jesus knew how to care for himself. He also knew to go to God the Father in times of need. But he also taught us to recognize that we are not alone God is with us always and we have nothing to fear if we have faith. This doesn't mean you won't have mental illness moments or experiences, but it does mean you have support by simply stating your needs through prayer and sharing these as one is comfortable with others.

Jesus also teaches us in John 15 that we are to abide in his love, keep his commandments and love one another. The reason for this? So that we may experience joy that is complete. The joy of Christ within us.

Going back to the fridge image—how full are you? Where do you turn for support? As a community of faith, we make connections with one another and share Christ's message of Love! This is not only our theme for this year, it is who we are as we strive to love one another in Jesus' name. Running out of everything? Remember what Jesus did –he took the bread, gave thanks, blessed it and distributed to all present. He provided what was needed in that time. We need to take the time to go before God and pray as well. *Philippians 4:6-7 tells us to not worry about anything but we are to let our requests be made known to God by prayer and supplication. And God will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. This will enable us to experience the peace of God we each crave.*

As believers in the Risen Christ our hope is found in understanding our whole being as being wonderfully made. But it is up to us to seek support from our church family, and those

who will enable us to clear our path to right living. Let us remember this as we are filled by the love we have for others and for God.

Let us pray

God of grace.. hear our prayer.

God of hope. Hear our prayer.

God of mercy and compassion. Fill us anew and enable us to have faith in you. Amen.