

YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT
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Change. Yikes.

If I had to give a theme to 2020, “Change” would be one of the top contenders.

The entire planet is has experienced it, a lot of it seemingly chaotic.

Some of it is was planned, though, such as my retirement.

I’ve been working on that for a couple of years. More on that later.

It may be that, as an Air Force brat, dealing with change is in my blood.

My young life was full of adventure, new people, and new places – especially new places:

before I got married at the ripe old age of 21, I had lived in some twenty places on three continents.

Change is something I grew up with.

Yet, one of the things that military brats yearn for is a sense of place,

a sense that we BELONG somewhere,

a home base where our personal history has some permanence.

I’ll never forget the time that, because I was born here, in Winter Haven, Florida,

I claimed to be a native Floridian.

A friend – a good one – whose family had lived in Miami for generations –

likely had no idea how much it hurt when he said,

“Nah, you’re not a Floridian. Your family isn’t from here.”

But, still, this state has been a home base for me throughout the decades.

About 12 years ago, Gus and I took a vacation, a road trip.

and I thought we’d try looking at a couple of places in Florida

that were important to the story I tell me about myself.

We saw the house my folks lived in when I was born,

then went to over to Cocoa Beach, Florida, on the east coast.

Cocoa Beach is where Gus and I met, way back in 1975, on Spring Break.

Yes, it’s true: your pastor went . . . *Where the Boys Are* – and she met a dilly!

But, maybe it wasn’t so wild . . .

we met at my grandparents’ vacation house in Cocoa Beach.

It wasn’t a grand house – no A/C, with old furniture and ratty towels,

but it could hold the entire family and lots of friends – some 25 of us.

A cousin brought Gus with him one year, and the rest is history.

For years, it was a place anyone in the family could always go.

But, after my grandparents both died in the mid 80s, the house was sold.

We still had friends in the area; when we’d visit them, we’d drive by the house and remember

and tell stories about the great times in that house

at the corner of Third St. South and South Atlantic Ave.

I guess I always dreamed maybe, some day, the family could get it back –

if one of us cousins won the lottery or somethin

Anyway, on our road trip in 2008, Gus and I went to Cocoa Beach,

to the corner of Third Street South and South Atlantic Ave.

No one will be buying the house, ever. It was torn down,

and the entire huge lot was cleared. It was desolate.

A sign said dozens of townhouses were on the way.

When we got back in the car, Gus saw my dejected face and said, "Were you surprised?"
I said, "rationally, I guess I knew development was inevitable.

But I was shocked by that empty lot; a part of me has been lost."

Well, thank you, 2020, for making us all feel shocked and lost.

Our rational minds know that pandemics and economic collapse can happen –
they've happened before.

For some of you, my retirement plopped on top of all that
is just an unpitted cherry on top of a cabbage and turnip sundae.

When we are faced with change, we can try to stop it,
keep trying to control things to force them to stay like they used to be.

OR, we can give up even trying to be responsible adults,
and just eat, drink and be merry, fiddling while Rome burns.

OR, we can ask ourselves what opportunities lie in this deserted place.

In my humble opinion, the ship has sailed on the option
of trying to control all the changes 2020 has thrown at us. We just don't have that many hands.

Just as my grandparents' house is gone, so is our blithe naiveté
that what happens to people far from here won't affect us.

Our globe is now way, way too small for that.

The second option, of giving up, brings only the bitter harvest of selfishness:
the loneliness and despair that result when no one cares about anyone else.

The third option is the one I'm going for, because it's what Jesus taught his disciples:
that no matter how deserted the landscape, how isolated the landscape,

we're all in this together and, together, we ALREADY have what we need
to meet the challenges facing us – and to THRIVE.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus, the disciples, and I'm guessing about 9,000 people,
if we DO count the women and children, thank you very much,
are in a desolate and isolated place. Much like 2020.

Jesus and the disciples had planned to go off by themselves
while Jesus privately grieved the death of his cousin, John the Baptist.

Suddenly, things changed dramatically: there's an enormous crowd.

The disciples know there is no way they can control feeding 9,000 people,
not in the wilderness. It *cannot* be done.

They immediately go for option number 2: they give up and take care of themselves.

They want keep what little they have and send the others away.

Jesus goes for option 3: they're in this together,
and he trusts that they already have what they need to do what should be done.

So, he tells the disciples: "YOU give them something to eat."

Their response? "WE HAVE NOTHING *EXCEPT* 5 loaves and 2 fish. For Jesus, that's enough.

Jesus tell the disciples: "Bring them here to me."

God blesses their bread, their fish, their hands, and they go,
go to distribute the food to others, as much as anyone could want.

How did they feed 9,000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish in a deserted place? I have no idea.

But I'm confident it happened, because I've seen it happen in my life.

Indeed, I've seen it happen: Right. Here.

Some may not know the amazing work this church family has done since 2010.

Back then, the parish was not financially self-sustaining. The Great Recession had been devastating,
the Deep Horizon oil spill had collapsed tourism, and attendance was low.

But there were dedicated, brave leaders here
who looked for opportunities in a desolate landscape.

A pivotal moment came in 2012, when we explored an important question:
 What assets DO we have? What gifts has God already given us?
 and, most essential, WHY has God given them to us?

What are we supposed to DO with our 5 loaves and 2 fish?
 We identified our assets, and found we had nearly unique 1,000 resources –
 our buildings, our skills and talents, and, yes, some money –
 but money was only one of the 1,000 assets.

Truly, our most important asset was: what we cared about.

Then we discerned, we prayed, and we honed in on God's call to this parish.
 No surprise that the first thing we found out is that this church family loves to eat,
 and it loves to feed all kinds of people. We did a lot of that. A LOT.

Food, fellowship, and fundraising flourished, and we had a blast doing it.
 We discerned that we wanted to be the heart and soul of our Dunedin,
 and welcomed all kinds of people, programs and groups, to share our campus –
 those "Gentiles" that live around us became our neighbors.

To have an inviting, safe, accessible campus,
 from 2013 to 2018 we raised hundreds of thousands of dollars and really fixed things up.

*The God of hope [filled us] with all joy and peace in faith
 so that [we overflowed] with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

We became a healthy, active, stable congregation, and had fun doing it.
 Now we're in 2020, and we seem to be back in a deserted place.

People all over are isolated and hungry and hurting. The parish is in a strange new time,
 On top of it all, a new rector will be coming. Things are out of control.

Time to pull back?

What I have to say is this: Nope. This is no time to give up.

This is the time for YOU to give them something to eat.

We already have everything we need.

Y'all know how to perform miracles because y'all've already done them.

I know some of you are thinking, "Easy for you to say, Missy,
 as you go play your fiddle somewhere in Bonita Springs."

Here's a secret, and don't tell our treasurer or the Vestry

or they'll wonder why they've been paying me all these years:

Y'ALL have done all the really hard work around here, not me.

It's all in the ten years of Annual Reports, which I read cover to cover:

Y'ALL are the ones that hosted the dinners, made brunches bodacious, brought in Bagzilla food,
 gave the money, worked with the contractors, baked the cookies, paid strangers' utility bills,
 and dropped your drawers.

Y'ALL are the ones who arranged the flowers, sewed the frocks, polished the brass,
 sold a couch, taught the children, visited the homebound, packed sacks for schoolkids,
 dusted the blinds, planted the breezeway,

found the fabulous music director AND a wonderful parish administrator,
 and welcomed the guests so that people know we really mean it when we say:

Come as you are. All are welcome. No exceptions.

Y'all let all kinds of folks know they really BELONG here.

All y'all have been worshipping our God with your lips and with your lives,
 doing the good works God has prepared for you to do,

and performing miracles with such joy, purpose, and generosity that you bring me to my knees.

So, yes, things have changed. Again.

Change happens. It's OK. Y'all have this.

All y'all need to do is look at what God has already given us,

bring everything to God, ask God to bless it and your hands and in God's name GO:

YOU give them something to eat! Love each other, love our neighbors,
and remember to love yourselves, because each of y'all is awesome.

You are blessed by a Lord who promises

that when we do what God has done and told us to do, too,

there will be enough – as much as anyone could want, and more.

COLLECT OF THE DAY:

Almighty God, we thank you for planting in us the seed of your word. By your Holy Spirit help us to receive it with joy, live according to it, and grow in faith and hope and love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

ISAIAH 55:1-5

All of you who are thirsty, come to the water! Whoever has no money, come, buy food and eat! Without money, at no cost, buy wine and milk!

Why spend money for what isn't food, and your earnings for what doesn't satisfy? Listen carefully to me and eat what is good; enjoy the richest of feasts. Listen and come to me; listen, and you will live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful loyalty to David. Look, I made him a witness to the peoples, a prince and commander of peoples. Look, you will call a nation you don't know, a nation you don't know will run to you because of the Lord your God, the holy one of Israel, who has glorified you.

PSALM 145:8-9, 15-22

The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and of great kindness.

The LORD is loving to everyone and his compassion is over all his works.

The LORD upholds all those who fall; he lifts up those who are bowed down.

The eyes of all wait upon you, O LORD, and you give them their food in due season.

You open wide your hand and satisfy the needs of every living creature.

The LORD is righteous in all his ways and loving in all his works.

The LORD is near to those who call upon him, to all who call upon him faithfully.

He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he hears their cry and helps them.

The LORD preserves all those who love him, but he destroys all the wicked.

My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD;

let all flesh bless his holy Name for ever and ever.

ROMANS 15:5-13

May the God of endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude toward each other, similar to Christ Jesus' attitude. That way you can glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ together with one voice.

So welcome each other, in the same way that Christ also welcomed you, for God's glory. I'm saying that Christ became a servant of those who are circumcised for the sake of God's truth, in order to confirm the promises given to the ancestors, and so that the Gentiles could glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, *Because of this I will confess you among the Gentiles, and I will sing praises to your name.* And again, it says, *Rejoice, Gentiles, with his people.* And again, *Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and all the people should sing his praises.* And again, Isaiah says, *There will be a root of Jesse, who will also rise to rule the Gentiles. The Gentiles will place their hope in him.*

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in faith so that you overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

MATTHEW 14:13-21

When Jesus heard about John, he withdrew in a boat to a **deserted place** by himself. When the crowds learned this, they followed him on foot from the cities. When Jesus arrived and saw a large crowd, he had compassion for them and healed those who were sick. That evening his disciples came and said to him, "**This**

is an isolated place and it's getting late. Send the crowds away so they can go into the villages and buy food for themselves."

But Jesus said to them, "There's no need to send them away. You give them something to eat."

They replied, "We have nothing here except five loaves of bread and two fish."

He said, "Bring them here to me." He ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves of bread and the two fish, looked up to heaven, blessed them and broke the loaves apart and gave them to his disciples. Then the disciples gave them to the crowds. Everyone ate until they were full, and they filled twelve baskets with the leftovers. About five thousand men plus women and children had eaten.

SERMON HYMN: *All Who Hunger, Gather Gladly*

BLESSING:

Deep peace of the running wave to you.

Deep peace of the flowing air to you.

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.

Deep peace of the shining stars to you.

Deep peace of the love of God to you.

The blessing of our Triune God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit,
be upon you now and forever.