

Why Do People Suffer? – August 2, 2015  
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## Why Do People Suffer? St. Matthew 14:13-21

When I was thirteen years old I believed I was in love with my Jr. High school English teacher. What? I peaked early! My teacher was wise in that she steered my energy into reading and she has been my star ever since.

I stumbled into the genre of Science Fiction initially and I remember one story where the residents of the city of Omelas lived safe and enchanted lives with their every need met. There was a fee for all of this: one child was held captive, and ill fed. And all the people of Omelas were forced to pass this child's cage annually to view this child.

Ridiculous, you say? How could anyone stay sane and content if their lifestyle was tied to the misery of others, particularly children? Yet, this is precisely what we in the first world countries do, at the cost of those who live in second and third world countries.

We don't look at it in this way, of course. In US North America we speak about ownership, what is ours, as if we are the creators of both the land and the seeds.

We rarely speak of our good luck living as if we deserve this fortune. And, we rarely look at our sisters and brothers in the face. We don't, like the Omelas, walk past the suffering and confess that our lifestyle is based on their misery.

As we saw last week, the feeding of the 5000 appears to get us off the hook. We look at this story and respect Jesus aware that we could not feed fifty people with what he had to work with. Jesus certainly deserves an 'Atta boy.'

St. Matthew's account of this story is different than St. John's. Matt begins this story following John the Baptist's 'off-with-your-head' experience. When Jesus learned about this injustice he left for some place to be by himself but the crowd followed him.

Please note the response of Jesus. He faced what each of us faces daily: choices. Caught between what he wanted to do and the needs of the crowd, St. Matthew says Jesus had compassion for the people.

This compassion of Jesus was gutsy. The original word has its roots in a word that means entrails or guts. In the first century Middle East people believed that it was in the intestines where true emotion originated. Jesus felt his guts churning and he responded with compassion, healing the sick and feeding the hungry.

The disciples initially responded as we often do: they offered an opinion: "*Let the crowd help themselves.*" Not totally unreasonable, although it was sure to put unbearable pressure on the local Taco Bell and McDonalds and Motel 6.

Jesus, however, always loves the personal touch. He requests his disciples to find food for the crowd. Again, like you and I, these are practical men. One of them says to Jesus: "*It ain't gonna happen.*" I often wonder what would have happened if these disciples had understood Jesus better, if they had caught a bit of his vision, would the miracle have been needed?

Holy Scripture clearly states that we are to treat each other as equals. Yet those who live in our Western world assume our relative wealth is due to our initiative. This breeds a sense of superiority over the rest of humankind. Is this true?

In his book, "*Gun, Gems, and Steel Diamond,*" Jared Diamond asks the question, how did the Western world develop the technology when other countries did not? The author invested decades of research and comes to the conclusion that hunter-gatherers are smarter and more resourceful than those who live in areas with technology. The answer is not genetics but geography. Eurasia's geography allowed advancements in agriculture and technology to spread east and west when the continents had physical boundaries that blocked transmission of changes north and south.

While the jury is out as to the veracity of this theory, it is true that a small percentage of people in a small percentage of land, control the majority of the world's wealth. Jesus' expectation of his disciples is when we see suffering we

experience a gutty compassion, that drives us to grow miracles of our own to share with others.

Remember the Sci Fi story I mentioned at the beginning of my sermon? Those who walk away from the Omelas, the ones who see the miserable child and refuse live at the expense of the lives of others, they become agents of change.

When we witness the suffering of others and it changes us and others, we know we are walking with Jesus and we are Companions in Christ. When it dawns on each of us that we don't need Jesus to feed the multitudes, because we already have Jesus' power within us if we are willing to be open and to ask. When we do this we find ourselves in a place where the majority of people cannot imagine: The Kingdom of God. Are you ready? Alleluia. Amen.