

**Sunday, August 6, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church**  
**Bible Study**  
**“Wrestling with Our Hunger”**  
**Genesis 32:22-31 and Matthew 14:13-21**

Open with a word of prayer

**Gathering Time** (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, ask participants, “What food sustains you?” (The participants could also mention spiritual food or meditative practices as part of their definition of what nourishes them). For example, talk about your favorite food or soul food for your body, prayer, meditation, and singing (spiritual food for your soul).

**Genesis 32:22-31. Context.** Last week, we learned how Jacob came to be the husband of both Leah and Rachel – not to mention their two servants/slaves – after he had served their father Laban for fourteen years. After another six, in which Jacob tended Laban's flocks, Jacob fell out of favor with Laban and God instructed Jacob to return home. True to form, Jacob's slipped away in the middle of the night, taking his family, flocks and herds with him before Laban knew what was happening. Eventually Laban caught up with Jacob, and finally they reconciled. But Jacob was convinced that it would not be so easy when it came to his brother Esau, who had vowed to kill him back when Jacob had stolen from him the blessing of their father Isaac, and who was now headed in his direction with 400 men. So Jacob sent gifts on ahead of him, hoping to appease Esau, and split his company into two groups so that at least one of them would survive. Jacob also took a moment to pray to God and remind God of the promise of blessing God had made to him – even as he feared for his life. And then ...

**Matthew 14:13-21. Context.** This week's reading tells the story of the feeding of the 5000. This episode is clearly central to the gospel story as a whole: it occurs six times in the four gospels (twice each in Mark and Matthew – the second time, of 4000 – once in Luke and John). Here Matthew emphasizes the eucharistic dimension of the event in the way he reports the blessing and breaking of the loaves (as at his last supper with his disciples), and emphasizes the messianic dimension by adding the phrase, "besides women and children," stressing the magnitude of the feeding that anticipates the abundance of the messianic banquet. Not accidentally, Matthew tells this story immediately following the report of the death of John the Baptist who was murdered as a party favor at a banquet held by King Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, who in turn had been the central figure in the massacre of the Innocents of the Christmas story.

**Read Genesis 32:22-31 and Matthew 14:13-21**

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn't make sense to you in the text?

## **Read Genesis 32:22-31 and Matthew 14:13-21 again -**

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

- We are invited to seek the face of God “when we gather for worship at work and in other opportune spaces.” Where did the people meet Jesus in the Matthean passage? What does it mean to meet God in places besides the worship setting? [Deserted place – the implication for meeting and finding God in various places acknowledges that God’s grace permeates all aspects of life. We can find and we are found by God in all of our joys and difficulties in/out of the church.]
- The Matthean version of “The Feeding of the Five Thousand” highlights the uniqueness of including women and children (verse 21). Such intentional inclusion wrestles with the “hunger” or the need to address social justice issues as disciples of Christ. What social justice issues do you “hunger” for? What keeps you up at night?
- One of the difficulties with addressing social justice issues is the cost. The disciples’ concern about the cost of feeding thousands of people is logical and realistic (verse 17). How do we, as modern disciples of Christ, reconcile the need to respond versus the cost of responding?
- Although Jesus’ command did not make sense at first, the disciples followed Jesus by bringing five loaves of bread and two pieces of fish to him. It seems that the Matthew passage is arguing that discipleship requires such a leap of faith to trust in Jesus’ ways. Do you agree with this kind of discipleship?
- Being a disciple of Christ is not just being one of the twelve apostles but also recognizing that we are also part of the hungry crowd. Disciples of Christ should wrestle with our own hunger and recognize that we also need Christ. We are not the Messiah or the bread and fish. Rather, we are channels and co-recipients of God’s grace and mercy. Please share your thoughts on how we can keep ourselves grounded and humble as we become disciples of Christ. How do we find dignity in being a channel of God’s grace and give God glory for how God uses us?

## **Closing Reflection Question**

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

**Prayer** (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

**Sending Forth** (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

Faithful God, we thank you for providing us with our daily bread whenever we are hungry. You have sustained us in every possible way, more than we could ever ask. We are blessed. We are fed. We are filled with your grace and love. With our nourished

selves, we pray that we will be able to partake in the goodness of your gospel. We pray that you will guide us in sharing your blessings, especially to those who are marginalized. In the name of the one who broke the bread for us, **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven

hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,

on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power

and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.