

## Who We Are: Engage

I want to begin my sermon by sharing some bad news – not surprising news – but bad news. There is a lot of pain and suffering and hate and violence and injustice in the world. So much so that it can feel overwhelming at times.

A few weeks ago, Marianna shared with us about a neo Nazi group coming to the campus of Eastern Nazarene to intimidate and terrorize Haitian refugee families being temporarily housed there. At a community meeting, we learned that it's not only the refugees but many of the students, especially students of color, who felt terrorized. Sadly, this is part of a national trend over the last seven or eight years where hate crimes have continued to rise and hate groups have come more and more out into the open.

Aside from the hate spewed by Nazi groups, Massachusetts, along with other major cities, are experiencing a refugee crisis as more and more people fleeing violence and extreme poverty in their home countries are making their way here. Massachusetts currently has close to 7000 refugees who need the basic necessities of life.

But it's not just the refugee crisis that can feel overwhelming. When we did our visioning work, we heard over and over again about the severity of mental health challenges in our community – really in every community. The Milton Coalition's student survey revealed that more than ½ of Milton high school students reported experiencing times of extreme anxiety or depression and, maybe most alarming of all, one quarter of our middle school students reported committing at least one act of self harm.

And I could give countless other examples about homelessness or poverty or racism or climate change or any number of problems that can feel overwhelming – that are overwhelming.

And in the midst of all this, we have boldly declared that an essential part of our mission is to engage the world in acts of service and justice. Friends, I'm so proud of our mission and especially this part of it, but, if I'm honest, I have to tell you that in the midst of so many challenges all around us, sometimes it's hard to know where to start. Fortunately, I think our Scripture today offers us a helpful perspective.

Jesus had been teaching and preaching the crowds and he went on teaching until late in the afternoon. And the disciples began to get worried. "Uh, excuse me Jesus," they say. "You know, these people have come a long way and, uh, well they got to eat to have strength for their journey, so you need to send them away so they can go and get something to eat."

And Jesus responds simply by saying, "You give them something to eat." And the disciples don't think it's possible. They respond to Jesus basically saying, "How can we possibly do what you are asking us to do?" And Jesus asks this wonderful question, "How many loaves do you have?" In other words, Jesus is saying, "before you tell me what you can't do, first let's look at what you can do. Ok, so you've got five loaves and two fish. Why don't you start there? Have the people sit down and just start passing out food and let's just see what happens."

You see, the disciples were looking at the crowd so much that they couldn't see the individual people. Maybe they wouldn't have enough to feed 5000 people, but they could feed five. We can't let the magnitude of human need stop us from doing what we can. So maybe we can't solve the mental health crisis, but we can do something. Maybe we can't figure out housing, jobs, and basic necessities for every refugee family, but we can do something. Maybe we can't solve all the world's problems but we can still engage the world in acts of service and justice.

I want you to hear about a few ways we are living into this priority. Adria Hasha is part of our mental health team that formed out of our visioning process and she's going to come and tell you a little about that work and Marshall Levy is going to come and share with you one small but important way we can serve the refugee families around us.

Friends, I want to remind us of the end of the story in our Scripture. Thousands of people ended up being fed. When we're faithful with what we have, when we do what little we can, Jesus has this amazing history of turning our little act into something huge. Jesus took those five loaves and two fish, and, somehow, 5000 people were fed. And there were even leftovers.

Friends, no matter how great human need is, God's grace is more than enough. If we get serious about engaging the world, if we dream boldly and don't limit ourselves to what we think might be possible, then I believe amazing things can happen, especially if we can trust that the end result is not really up to us. We trust that God can still take a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish and make a whole lot of people's lives far better off. May we have the faith to start doing whatever we can. May we have the faith to start passing out our bread and fish. Amen.