

The Gospel of Matthew Feeding the Hungry

Interpreting the Text:

1. Herod orders the beheading of John the Baptist, but it's two women – Herodias and her daughter – who convince him to do so. Why does the author of Matthew give these women the responsibility for John's death, instead of Herod?
2. In Matthew 15:11, Jesus teaches, "It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." Why do the Pharisees take offense to this teaching? How is Matthew portraying the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees?
3. Matthew often tells stories in pairs, featuring an event two times. Large feeding miracles occur on two occasions. How does this kind of repetition impact the way Matthew's gospel is read? What is significant about the similarities and differences between them?

Applying the Text:

1. Many people find Jesus' response to the Canaanite woman offensive. Do you find it disturbing? Why or why not?
2. Jesus changing his mind while in conversation with the Canaanite woman (15:27-28) has been described as a "teachable moment," in which Jesus learned from the woman. Yet, for some, the idea that Jesus would have anything to learn is troublesome. What is your reaction to this depiction of Jesus?
3. Matthew 16:13-20 has led to centuries of debate over the organization of Christ's church, from the establishment of the Pope in Rome, through the Protestant Reformation, and into today. How does this portion of Matthew make you think about your own church structure (institutional or otherwise)?
4. What does it mean today to "take up your cross and follow Jesus continuously"? What is the role of suffering in discipleship today?

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