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**Configurations**  
(Matthew 14:13-21)

*Configurations*

For those of you who like opera, you might know *Elektra* as a wildly passionate production about rage, fear, and forgetting, and to a lesser extent, what constitutes a “normal” family.

To those of you who don’t like opera, take my word for it, *Elektra* is essentially a blur of non-stop shrieking saved only by the fact that it clocks in at less than two hours.

To stage this version of an ancient story, the opera’s librettist, Hugo von Hoffmansthal, employed what he called configurations. These are groupings of characters on the stage, usually two or three at the most. The music, the singing, and the drama react according to what configuration of characters is on stage at a given moment. Thus each character has the ability to alter what the audience is experiencing by the emotion they bring when they enter the stage and the extent to which they dominate the other characters.

For Elektra, the voice of anger, it is a pathological obsession with avenging the death of her father. For Elektra’s mother, the voice of fear, it is fear that her husband’s death will be avenged, because she caused it. For Elektra’s sister, the voice of self-interest, it is the longing to get on with life. And it was the case with other character, as well: the loudest voice determined the spirit of the show.

At first I thought this was a clever technique, but then I realized: that’s life. That’s human interaction in a nutshell. Not the shrieking, but the configurations.

*Into Our World*

Just before the birth of Christ, John the Baptist’s father prophesied: “By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1:68-79)

Thirty years later that light, Jesus, learned of John the Baptist's death and sought to mourn him in solitude. Nevertheless, the crowds found him and presented themselves for healing and then for food.

The Bible tells us Jesus, far from being upset, was filled with compassion for the crowd. It is almost as if he was able to take his love for John that caused him to mourn and mold it into acts of love for others.

But if we say Jesus came and healed the sick and fed the hungry and leave it at that, Jesus' life doesn't amount to a lot. Today's scripture is included for a reason other than for us to think what a great guy he was.

The Bible broadcasts meaning across time and circumstance and I don't think it is out of line to suggest that we understand this as God's response to a sick and hungry world. Sickness: the need for healing not just of physical pains, but of mental, spiritual, or psychological pain as well. Hunger: the desire for something to fill us, to nourish us. As it was then, it is now.

### *Into Our Lives*

The new dawn breaks upon us. What does that really mean?

I won't try to speak for you, but this is what it feels like for me: Nobody complained more about the weather of the past couple weeks than I did. I don't like hot weather and I complained and complained as if I could change it: "I can't breathe, I can't move, I can't think..." but to no avail.

And then Monday evening that storm pulled into town. I looked at the clouds as they darkened the sky and thought to myself "something's going to change." Sure enough, the rain just sliced through the heat and Tuesday, life was restored. I was free to live, free from nature's sweltering sweating grip. Good weather, that's all it was, but for a day, it changed my life.

Fifteen years ago, *I* was the voice of anger, *I* was the voice of fear, *I* was the voice of self-interest, as if I alone ran my life. Ridiculous. I was spiritually sick and hungry. But then something changed and it keeps changing with each new dawn.

*Reconfigured*

You know, I may have given the false impression that I don't like *Elektra*. The truth is that I really do like it, especially as an example of how not to live life.

For the members of Elektra's family life is a battle of wills, a zero sum society of winners and losers. Each character has to assert themselves or they will be prey to the twisted motivations of the others.

But for those who seek healing and nourishment, John the Baptist gave us a better equation. He said "I must decrease, that he may increase." When my voice is silent is when I begin to hear God. When my will is least and God's will is at the center of the stage, that is when I begin to live.

The dawn from on high has broken upon us, it provides light to those of us in darkness and in the shadow of death. It guides our feet into the way of peace, a path made for us by Jesus.

Jesus was selfless. Becoming Christ-like is to become filled with the compassion behind the healings and the feeding of the 5000 at a time when most of us would rather be left alone.

Being Christ-like means entering into the lives of others, not as the voice of anger, the voice of fear, or the voice of self-interest, but the face, the voice, the actions of compassion. We ourselves become reconfigured in the likeness of Christ, learning to transform others with God's love.

It's what our lives are to be about. Not the shrieking, the configurations.