

Matthew 14:13-21

13 When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. 14 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. 15 As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.” 16 Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.” 17 “We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered. 18 “Bring them here to me,” he said. 19 And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. 20 They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. 21 The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Have you ever had to rely on someone to provide something for you and they failed to come through when you needed them? Think about the life of Joseph and everyone who let him down. Joseph had ten older brothers to trust in to provide safety and protection, but they sold him off into slavery. Joseph worked hard for Potiphar in his household, but when he was falsely accused by Potiphar’s wife, Potiphar failed to stand up for him and Joseph ended up in prison. After interpreting the cupbearer’s dream, Joseph asked him to mention him to Pharaoh, but the cupbearer failed to remember until two years later. Through Joseph’s trials, there were many people who let him down, but God never did. It was all a part of his plan for Joseph to become the second in command of Egypt. In that position he would be able to save up the grain during the abundant years to provide food during the famine years not only for the Egyptians but also the families of his father Jacob and his brothers. This morning/evening we will look at one of Jesus’ most well-known miracles and see that we too can **Trust in Jesus to Provide**. First, because **he shows compassion** and second, because **he meets our needs**.

Verse 13: “When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns.” The previous verses tell us what had happened—King Herod had beheaded John the Baptist and his disciples had come and told Jesus (v. 12). So Jesus withdrew to a solitary place. Part of this may have been to mourn for John, his cousin. But as the three years of Jesus’ ministry progressed he would withdraw more often. Herod was looking for him after hearing about the miracles Jesus performed (Lk 9:9) and he was avoiding that attention. Jesus also used this solitary time to pray and strengthen himself as well as teach and strengthen his disciples.

But Jesus just couldn’t get away. The crowds followed him. Verse 14: “When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.” Jesus didn’t try to turn them away, he didn’t try to avoid them and turn around the boat. Instead he had compassion on them. The word that is used here for “having compassion” is very unique. In our culture when we talk about love and compassion we figuratively describe it as coming from the heart. In their culture they pictured it as coming from a lower area, the intestines, the gut—that was their source of strong emotions. So this phrase “having compassion” was not meant for any light or momentary feelings. But it was a strong emotion, a gut feeling. Jesus was not forced to reluctantly help those who were interrupting his downtime, but he wanted to help them. So he healed their sick, he spent time teaching them about the kingdom of God as Luke describes in his account (Lk 9:11), and as we will talk about more in the second part, he fed them a meal.

As we learn to trust in Jesus to provide, his compassion plays an important part. Put yourself in the role of providing help for others. How often aren't we motivated by things other than compassion? We do it because we have to, that's our job. We do it because we want others to see how good we are. We may decide not to provide help because we think they don't deserve it. As sinful human beings we often display a superficial compassion based on self-interest rather than a sacrificial compassion based on others.

Now put yourself in the role of receiving help from God. Our sinful self can drag us down to thinking that we are small and insignificant in God's eyes, he couldn't possibly have time for us. Other people have bigger problems or Jesus is just too busy taking care of other things to deal with me and my requests.

But Jesus is never like this. He will provide for us because of his great compassion. It is true that we are miserable sinners who deserve nothing from him. But he still loves us anyway. And his compassion is never superficial or self-interested. He demonstrated that compassion when he went to the cross to sacrifice himself for everyone who has ever lived. He will never be too busy for us or reluctantly give his attention to our prayers. As true God he is more than able to handle the requests of everyone who comes to him.

For the crowd that had followed him, not only did he show them compassion, he also met their needs. He healed them, he fed them spiritually through teaching, and he also fed them physically. But this was no normal meal. Verse 15: "As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.'" The disciples thought they had a plan in place to take care of the people. But Jesus had another plan in mind—he replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat" (v. 16). The disciples of course could not do that with only five loaves of bread and two fish. Only Jesus could provide and truly meet the needs of the people.

Think of the scale of here that demonstrated Jesus' power. Verse 21 mentions "five thousand men, besides women and children." If everyone had been counted that number may have doubled or even tripled. Think of how much food it would take to feed the entire city of Red Wing. And this meal was more than a scrap of bread and some bites of fish to tide you over. Verse 20 says they were satisfied, meaning they ate until they were full, and then there were still twelve basketfuls of leftovers.

What was Jesus' purpose in performing such a miracle? It was in part to feed their physical hunger, but that wasn't the only reason. If it had been, then he would have agreed to be the bread king that some of them wanted who would provide meals like this all the time. It was more about their spiritual hunger. This power demonstrated that he was the Son of God and that he would be the Messiah who would save them from sin, death and the devil. This was the spiritual feeding that Isaiah prophesied about in our scripture lesson (Isa 55:1-5), an everlasting covenant of eating and drinking without cost with the result that their souls might live forever in heaven. Yes, Jesus would meet their physical needs, but more importantly he had come to meet their spiritual needs as their Savior.

When it comes to our physical needs, we like to think we are in charge. We plan and make decisions for our schooling and jobs and finances and homes and retirement so that everything will turn out just right. We get so caught up in thinking we are in charge that we put so much time and effort into our physical feeding that we neglect our families and our health and most importantly our spiritual feeding. But like the disciples we soon learn that our solutions are

not going to work. Things happen that are out of our control. We live in a sin-stricken world with sin-stricken people and the tighter the control we try to have, the more it seems to slip away.

So we trust in Jesus to provide because only he can meet our needs. He talked about our priorities earlier in Matthew's record of his Sermon on the Mount: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well" (6:33). Our spiritual feeding is of first priority. Through Word and Sacrament we are reminded of the sacrifice that Jesus made for us and the spot in eternity that is waiting for us. Only Jesus could do this for us. Our spiritual victory reminds us that our physical feeding and building our life in this world is not as important as we sometimes make it out to be. But at the same time Jesus has promised to give us these things as well, only he is able to be in charge. The Son of God who won for us our salvation will continue to provide our physical needs until the day comes when they are no longer needed.

We have all had someone in the past whom we trusted who then failed to provide what we needed. And it will happen again in the future. That is only to be expected as we live with sinful people in a sinful world. This makes it all the more important that we have Jesus to trust in to provide for us. He showed his compassion through sacrificing himself to meet our need of being saved from the punishment of sin and death. He will continue to show his compassion as he daily forgives our sins while meeting our needs both spiritually and physically until the day that our souls will live forever in heaven. We trust in Jesus to provide because we know that he will never fail us. Amen.