

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost August 20, 2017

Matthew 14:13-21 (EHV) – ¹³When Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place to be alone. When the crowds heard this, they followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴When Jesus got out of the boat, he saw a large crowd. He had compassion on them and healed their sick. ¹⁵When evening came, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place and the hour is already late. Send the crowds away, so that they can go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” ¹⁶But Jesus said to them, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.” ¹⁷They told him, “We have here only five loaves and two fish.” ¹⁸“Bring them here to me,” he replied. ¹⁹Then he instructed the people to sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves and the two fish. After looking up to heaven, he blessed them. He broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples. The disciples gave the food to the people. ²⁰They all ate and were filled. They picked up twelve basketfuls of what was left over from the broken pieces. ²¹Those who ate were about five thousand men, not even counting women and children.

Introduction

Some of you know that my job during high school, college, and seminary was as a cook at a family restaurant attached to a truck stop on Hwy 41. It wasn't a “greasy spoon” kind of place, but drew in a lot of the locals, especially after 2 am on Fridays and Saturdays and after church on Sundays – albeit totally different crowds, as you can probably imagine. I put in my time on 3rd shift, but Sunday mornings were always my favorite. That was the busiest shift and the time usually flew by.

We usually could make do with just two people on the line, even when the restaurant was packed. Any more than that just got in the way. I usually handled the grills and the other person got the position affectionately known as the “toastmaster.” That was a fitting description, because his or her main job was putting bread into the revolving toaster, buttering it as it came out, putting it on the plates, and shooting them out to the waitresses. A couple of us worked so well together that we could usually keep ahead of the toaster, and there'd be a couple loaves worth of bread slices queued up, waiting to go in.

Theme: Jesus Satisfies Us with an Abundance of Bread.

We went through a whole lot of bread at that restaurant, but today's Gospel Lesson puts it all to shame. I'll bet the disciples were hard pressed to keep up with Jesus as he served up order after order after order of bread and fish.

As with all of Jesus' miracles, we want to study it with the goal of understanding what it all means for us. The lesson this miracle teaches is pretty obvious. Today God's Word teaches the lesson that **JESUS SATISFIES US WITH AN ABUNDANCE OF BREAD. He provides the bread of life so that we might know his compassion. He provides daily bread so that we might know his credentials.**

Part I: He provides the bread of life that we might know his compassion.

Previously, Jesus had sent out the twelve disciples in pairs to give them a taste of the ministry. Now they'd returned to Jesus, and he was going to give them one final year of instruction before he sent them out into the mission fields. Sounds kind of like vicar and senior years at the seminary. Besides that, a shocking event had just taken place. John, the forerunner to the Messiah, had been beheaded for confronting the sinful affair of King Herod with his sister-in-law. That sets the stage for our miracle.

“When Jesus heard this (what had happened to John), he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place to be alone. When the crowds heard this, they followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus got out of the boat, he saw a large crowd. He had compassion on them and healed their sick.”

The private moments that Jesus was able to spend with his disciples were few and far between. But not once did he tell the crowds of people to just go away and leave him alone. When they came to him for help, he didn't disappoint them. Jesus had only a few moments alone with his disciples in the boat before landing and being swamped with requests for help. Our text says that his heart went out to them with compassion. Mark's Gospel says that **“they were like sheep without a shepherd”** and, Good Shepherd that he was, Jesus wasn't about to waste an opportunity to give them the guidance and nourishment they needed.

If we only had Matthew's and John's accounts, it would seem that Jesus only provided for their physical needs. That's far from the truth. Jesus abundantly provided for them by serving up a full-course meal – with the good news of salvation, the bread of life, as the appetizer. Mark says that **“he began to teach them many things,”** and Luke says that these many things were **“about the kingdom of God,”** which we've been hearing so much about these past few weeks. Like the sower, he cast the seed of the gospel onto the soil of their hearts so that they might trust in him as the Savior and not just as an insightful teacher and worker of miracles.

There are several things in this text that we can take to heart and also some things that we can imitate in our own lives of faith. First of all, Jesus is no less our Good Shepherd than he was for those thousands who lived in villages along the Sea of Galilee. When we're like sheep without a shepherd, wandering aimlessly toward dangerous cliffs that would threaten our faith, Jesus gently guides us back to the fold. When we're hungry and thirsting for mercy because of our countless acts of disobedience, he restores our souls with the refreshing message of sins forgiven. When we come to him looking only for wealth, and success, and solutions to worldly problems, and failing health, he turns our hearts and minds to spiritual matters by first giving us the bread of life in rich supply. Take to heart the love of Jesus in reminding us of the priority in his ministry. Our souls come first, and his heart goes out to us so that he might build up our faith through his Word.

Another application for us is the encouragement to set aside time in personal spiritual growth so that we might be better equipped to join in Jesus' outreach ministry. He's provided abundant opportunities for us to be fed. There is no lack of spiritual sustenance, free for the taking. How good and necessary it is to get away from the cares and distractions of the world and be reminded of our Savior's love for us, as evidenced by his life, death and resurrection!

A third application is found in the actions of the townspeople. Although they came by-and-large for the wrong reasons, their zeal in gathering around Jesus can't be denied. Do we show that same zeal in coming to hear Jesus speak to us? Or does it practically take an act of God to stir us up out of bed in the morning? Do we speak the confession of sins, and sing the hymns, and come for communion as mere formalities, or do we treat them as the highest points of the week, without which our lives would feel incomplete? Let's run to sit at the feet of Jesus with the same zeal that he showed in carrying out our salvation. Nothing distracted him.

Transition

In a spiritual sense, Jesus abundantly provides for us. He provides the bread of life so that we might know his compassion. But he also provided physically. He provides daily bread so that we might know his credentials.

Part II: He provides daily bread that we might know his credentials.

From John's Gospel, we learn that Jesus had in mind what he was going to do from the moment he saw the crowds approaching. Before he taught them about the kingdom, he'd asked Philip where they were going to get food for all these people. Then, by the time evening came, the disciples had decided that there was no way they had the means to provide even a bite for each person that was there. They'd failed Jesus' test. Long forgotten was the fact that he'd once miraculously provided somewhere in the area of 150 gallons of wine for a wedding banquet.

When Jesus told them to give the people food to eat, they answered, **“We have here only five loaves and two fish.’ ‘Bring them here to me,’ he replied. Then he instructed the people to sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves and the two fish. After looking up to heaven, he blessed them. He broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples. The disciples gave the food to the people. They all ate and were filled. They picked up twelve basketfuls of what was left over from the broken pieces. Those who ate were about five thousand men, not even counting women and children.”**

All of Jesus' miracles had the same goal – to prove that he was no ordinary human, but was the very Son of God. They displayed his credentials. They became convincing proofs that he was qualified and capable of carrying out what he claimed about himself.

Aren't we so often like the disciples, who showed a lack of faith in Jesus to provide? So many times we fail to trust the Lord and his promises to help us in all situations. Doesn't it seem that for every dollar we make, ten different hands are legitimately reaching out for their share? How can we stretch it to meet all the needs – in our congregation and in our synod? at Festival, Shopko, and Kwik Trip? in the present and farther off in retirement?

But notice the greatness of Jesus' miracle. There was more left over than they'd started with. Not only did everyone get a bite to eat, they ate their fill. And isn't that always the case? Jesus' generosity is always many times greater than our need. It begins with his spiritual generosity – **“where sin increased, grace increased all the more,”** and **“Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.”** It carries over into the physical realm as well. When you feel that God can't possibly provide for your earthly needs, he says, **“Just try me. See if I won't throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you won't have enough room for it.”**

Even today, Jesus continues to provide our daily bread so that we might look to him as the provider of all things. He sustains our physical needs to point us to the greater provision of our salvation, accomplished for us on Calvary's cross.

Conclusion

Jesus is truly a suitable Savior – not as a bread-king, but as the Almighty One who invites us to feast on him – that is, to believe on him for salvation. He's abundantly provided for you and will continue to do so. Flock to him daily to be satisfied from the rich morsels of bread that he so abundantly provides. Amen.