

**Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost – August 24, 2014**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

*Pastor Charles Heup*

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

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.

Fellow followers of our Lord,

The disciples whom Jesus called to follow him had the opportunity to experience firsthand the blessings of his visible presence. He was there to show them the love of the Father through his teachings, his actions and his miracles. He often met together with them in private to help them to grow in their understanding of their role as his disciples. Following the beheading of John the Baptist by wicked King Herod Jesus had sent out the twelve two-by-two to preach and perform miracles in his name.

People were amazed at what they taught and did in Jesus' name and now the apostles were eager to tell Jesus everything that had happened. But so many people were flocking around Jesus and his disciple that neither he nor his disciples had a chance to eat. And so Jesus invited his disciples to come with him into a boat and to go with him to a quiet place where they could get some rest. If they could be alone Jesus would also be able to provide them with some private instructions so that they could grow in their faith.

But soon people recognized the boat that Jesus was in and followed along the shore line so that they would be able to be with Jesus too. Our text tells us that **when Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.** Jesus saw their physical needs and he was willing to help them with his miracles. But it wasn't just the physical needs that filled Jesus with compassion. The other gospel accounts help us to see that Jesus was concerned about both their physical and their spiritual needs. Luke reports that Jesus **welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.**

Jesus' heart went out to the crowds of people because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Tenderness of heart and compassion are the trademarks of Jesus ministry. It was ultimately this compassion that led him to the cross where he laid down his life for sinful mankind.

The large crowds of people in a remote location presented an interesting situation. Jesus anticipated this situation when he spoke with his disciple Philip and asked him, **"Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"** 6) **He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.** (John 6:5-6) As we read this account in John's gospel we can almost hear the despair in Philip's voice as he responds: **"Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"**

How are we going to meet the needs of this large crowd of people – that was the question which occupied the minds of the disciples as Jesus taught the crowds of people about the kingdom of God. The disciples searched in vain for an answer. They did discover a young boy who had brought along two fish and five small loaves of bread. But what good would that do?

If Jesus' disciples had had watches – I'm guessing that they would have been checking them regularly and fidgeting the more time passed and the longer Jesus spoke. Finally as the sun is getting lower and lower in the sky Jesus disciples approached him with their plan for meeting the needs of the people. **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."** Don't bother us with this situation, let the people take care of themselves – that was their solution to a situation that Jesus had anticipated and already had decided how he would handle it. Their suggestion emphasizes the despair and lack of trust in Jesus that they had carried with them from the time the crowds had first arrived.

Perhaps we've found ourselves in similar situations – filled with despair not knowing what we were going to do next. And like the disciples this despair is the result of our failures to trust that God knows our needs and is able to do something about those needs. What happens next in our text shakes us out of despair and lack of trust. The miracle that takes place reminds us to

**Theme:** Depend on Jesus to Meet Your Needs

1. He knows what you need
2. He provides what you need

Can you imagine the sinking feeling, the look of horror on the faces of the disciples when Jesus responded to their suggestion that he dismiss the crowds of people so they could buy by saying, **"They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."** Can you hear them stuttering and stammering trying to get the words out of their mouths as they finally explain: **"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish, how far will they go among so many?"**

Have we at times echoed that same lack of faith as we wondered how we could make do with the little that we have? I know I'm guilty of failing to depend on the Lord at times. In spite of the Lord's promises to take care of our needs, in spite of the wonderful way in which we have seen him meet the needs of others in the Scriptures we still fret and worry don't we? We still at times toss our hands up in despair like those disciples.

The encouragement not to despair but to depend on the Lord is an encouragement which we need to hear. The secret, if you will, to depending on the Lord begins with a confidence that he knows our needs. This text reminds us once again that our Savior knows our needs. When we think of needy people in the situation presented in our text we would quite naturally think of the needs of the those sick hungry people who had spent their day with Jesus in a remote place. Their physical needs jump out at us don't they. Jesus saw those needs – he healed the sick. And he will feed the hungry.

Jesus also understood the spiritual needs of the crowd who had followed him to this remote place. It's likely they came in search of his miracles of healing but he didn't just provide physical healing. He understood their spiritual needs – and so he spoke to them about the kingdom of God. Those needs also seem quite apparent to us don't they?

Let me ask you a question before we continue our discussion of this miracle of Jesus. "If you were to picture yourself in this account, who would you be?" Would you identify yourself with one of the people in the crowd? As a young Sunday School student I liked to envision myself as the little boy with the food. But I have

a hunch that it's a bit easier for many of us to identify with Jesus disciples rather than one of the crowd. After all we have sat regularly at his feet, so to speak, to learn from him. He has involved us in a partnership with himself giving us the privilege of serving him in his kingdom. We have quite a bit in common with the twelve, don't we?

Now let me ask another question. What were the needs of the twelve? Remember why they had left with Jesus in the first place. They needed time alone with him. After completing the rigors of traveling through the various villages and towns with his message they needed time to recharge their spiritual batteries, if you will. They also needed to be reminded of the Lord's power and strength to provide in time of need. Their faith needed strengthening. And they needed Jesus to turn their despair into trust for future blessings.

The miracle that Jesus performed addressed each of those needs – our needs by showing us that we can depend on the Lord to take care of our needs. In his tender way Jesus would involve his weak and despairing disciples as his partners in meeting the needs of the crowd.

When Jesus heard that his disciples had discovered 2 fish and 5 loaves of bread he said to them. **"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.**

Notice Jesus didn't take them to task for their doubts, their despair and their worries. Surely the one whose Word called all things into existence from nothing didn't need the fish and the bread but he gladly accepted what they offered and would use it for his purposes. And doesn't the Lord Jesus do the same for us? He lets us enjoy the privilege of serving others in his place. He takes our meager offerings and accomplishes more than we could ever imagine.

After the people were seated in groups of 100's and 50's as Mark reports to us Jesus spoke a prayer of thanks to his heavenly father – a prayer which also indicated his trust and confidence in his Father's power. And then he gave to his disciples. And they took what he gave and shared it with the crowd. He provided them with what they needed so they could serve him. And the Lord also gives to us – time, talents, treasure – so that we in turn can use what he gives to serve him as we serve the crowds around us by sharing his blessings with them.

Jesus' miracle is reported so simply and yet beautifully: **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.** Jesus' miracle wasn't a matter of adding water to soup to stretch out the number of servings there would be. No this miracle provided all the men, women and children who were there – people who likely had not eaten all day and who had worked up an appetite by walking to where Jesus was with enough food so that they were completely satisfied. And after all had eaten, 5000 men plus women and children there were leftovers – 12 basketfuls – one for each of the disciples to consider for themselves the amazing ability of the Lord Jesus to provide for their needs. They too had eaten and were satisfied – they held in their hands the evidence that they had no reason to fret and worry and despair – they had a Lord who revealed his love for them by strengthening their weak faith in him and by showing them how foolish their despair and lack of trust really was.

They had seen one again how compassionate and powerful a Savior Jesus is. And so have we. This miracle has reminded us to cast all our cares and anxieties on the Lord because he cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). This miracle assures us that the one who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all will also together with him graciously give us all things. (Rom 8:31-32) And finally this miracle teaches us a lesson in priorities – the same lesson Jesus taught the crowds when he first nourished their souls and then sent them home with

happy souls and full tummies. Jesus own words remind us to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.

Sadly the crowd didn't completely learn that lesson. We hear later in the gospels that the crowds wanted to make Jesus their bread king. And here is a place, perhaps where we must identify ourselves with the crowd – We don't always place our soul's welfare over everything in life, do we? So often we can become more concerned about the grocery bills, the doctors bills, the rent or the mortgage payment and all the other bills than we are about nourishing our souls with the word, growing in our faith and advancing the kingdom of God.

The one who fed this crowd with a little boy's lunch is the one who knows and takes care of our needs. He says to us: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in my will never be thirsty." (John 6:35) He is the one who has prepared a place for us in heaven where we by his grace will enjoy the wonderful blessings of his grace for all eternity. So my dear followers of Christ,

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- Amen.