

August 6, 2023
Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Matthew 14:13-21

JESUS PROVIDES FOR BODY AND SOUL.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

In our Gospel text this morning Jesus attempts to withdraw to desolate place. Withdrawing to be alone is not that uncommon for Jesus. Sometimes He withdraws to pray. Other times He withdraws so He can teach His disciples alone. And still other times, He withdraws to avoid confrontation with the Pharisees and religious leaders. They were seeking to kill Him, but the hour of His suffering and death had not yet come when He would reveal His divine glory on Calvary's cross. (cf: John 13:1) That is why He told his disciples to:

"... tell no one that he was the Christ." (Matthew 16:20)

It was His will that the disciple's minds would be opened to understand the Scriptures after His Resurrection. (cf: Luke 24:45) For now, there is work yet to be done. There are many lost souls to be sought out and saved and Jesus is the One who will do it. He is God in the flesh of man who has come win salvation for all mankind, rescuing us from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

Jesus is fully God, but He is also fully man. According to His human nature, His body reacts like any other man's. All of the preaching and teaching and traveling from place to place is both physically and emotionally exhausting. He is the One who has borne our griefs and carries our sorrows. There was one time He was so tired, He slept in the back of the boat while a windstorm was filling the boat with water. The disciples thought they were perishing. Jesus said they had little faith. (cf: Matthew 8:23–27)

In our text, John the Baptist's disciples bring word that King Herod has put John to death. No matter how accustomed Jesus has become to hearing bad news, He is not cold and calloused. Bad news strikes Him like it strikes you and me. He wept at the news of His good friend Lazarus dying, even though He knew in advance that it would happen. (cf: John 11:35) By raising Lazarus, Jesus would demonstrate the truth that He is the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Him will never die. (cf: John 11:25–26) Through Lazarus' resurrection the faith of His disciples would grow. (cf: John 11:9–10)

John the Baptist's death was a year prior to Lazarus'. John was God's messenger, the voice of one crying in the wilderness announcing the reign of God on earth, proclaiming the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. (cf: Matthew 3:1–17) Like with Lazarus, the omniscient Jesus likely already knew of John's beheading. But upon hearing the news it strikes Jesus. Yet rather than going back to raise John from dead, Jesus gets in a boat all alone to sail off to a

desolate place. But the crowds have something else in mind. They follow Jesus on foot. They go by land. Jesus goes by sea. Instead of finding rest and recuperation:

“When [Jesus] went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.” (Matthew 14:14)

An important point to make here is that even though you and I do not deserve anything more than eternal damnation, in the God the Father’s goodness and mercy, He still provides for all your needs of body and soul. He is able to do all things in spite of the appearances of the situation in which you find yourself. It is His divine right and prerogative to provide for all of your needs in the ways that He deems best for your eternal good and for His glory.

They say that everything happens for a reason. If that is the case, sometimes the reason that something bad happens to you is that you made a really bad decision. Other times, it is simply because of the inherited sin that has infected your body. In your trials and tribulations, is God testing you? Is the devil afflicting you? Or are you merely suffering the temporal consequences of the desires of your sinful flesh and your poor judgement?

While Jesus did indeed raise Lazarus from the dead, Lazarus only lived to die another day. Why did not Jesus go back and raise John? Why do you and your loved ones suffer? The answer is hidden in wise council of God. (cf: Job 15:8) Take heart knowing that:

“... the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” (1 Corinthians 1:25)

In the God the Father’s goodness and mercy, He provides for all your needs of body and soul – even when it does not look like it. Jesus has had and continues to have compassion on you. He is the One who will provide, and He is going to do it in the way that He deems best – even if His way seems strange and backward to you and me.

Rather than going back to raise John from dead, Jesus gets in a boat all alone to sail off to a desolate place where He has compassion on the people. And that is the primary message of the miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand. It is about the compassionate power of Jesus. (cf: Gibbs, Matthew 11:2–20:34, Concordia Commentary, 751)

Earlier in St Matthew’s Gospel Jesus had compassion on the crowds because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (cf: Matthew 9:36) In the Feeding of the Four Thousand, Jesus Himself says:

“I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.” (Matthew 15:32)

Just prior to His entry into Jerusalem where He would be brutally crucified for the sins of the world, Jesus had compassion on two blind men and restored their sight. (cf: Matthew 20:33–34) In our text today we hear about ***who*** Jesus is and about ***how much*** God cares about the needs of His people, in this age and in the age to come. He has compassion.

He was in the beginning with God. All things that were made were made through Him. (cf: John 1:2–3) He was in the pillar of cloud by day and in the pillar of fire by night when God led His people out Egypt into the Promised Land. He fed the Hebrews for 40 years in the wilderness with manna and quail. He quenched their thirst with water from a rock. (cf: Exodus 16:13, 35) St Paul testifies, they:

“... all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.” (1 Corinthians 10:4)

As the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, they needed God’s provision, and He graciously provided even when they did not think that He would or He could. It was not always what they wanted. It was not always what anyone would have expected. This is the same God and Christ Jesus who has compassion on you and still provides for all your needs of body and soul – even when it does not look like it.

Jesus withdraws to a desolate place but it is not a lonely place. It is filled with five thousand men, plus women and children. Who would have blamed Him if He would have sailed on by like you and I do when we are too tired and do not have the energy to serve and love our neighbor. [sarcasm on→ You say things like: *“I’m sorry but I cannot be troubled right now. I have places to go, people to see, and things to do.”* Or you say: *“I’m really sorry but I’m too exhausted... I’m too sick... I’m not equipped with the resources to help you.”* [← sarcasm off] But not Jesus. He saw the great crowd, and He had compassion on them and healed their sick.

Jesus aside His own exhaustion and burdens in order to carry the burdens of the enormous crowd. Do not forget, Jesus’ needs were great. He needs time to spend in prayer and devotion. He needs time to be refreshed by His Father in heaven. But having compassion, He lays it all aside He cares for the crowds, removing their burdens, and healing their sickness. And yet there was another problem. As the end of the day drew near, the disciples want to send the crowds away to the villages to buy food. St Matthew records:

“... Jesus said, ‘They need not go away; you give them something to eat.’ They said to him, ‘We have only five loaves here and two fish.’ And he said, ‘Bring them here to me.’” (Matthew 14:16–18)

With the crowds seated on the grass, Jesus takes the loaves and fish, looks to heaven and gives thanks. He breaks the bread and gives it to the disciples who in turn, give it to the people. The disciples, in the stead and by the command of Jesus, serving what was ordinary, but what Christ made extraordinary. Five loaves and two fish. Fish sandwiches to feed the people. Not just to tide them over but all ate and were satisfied, plus 12 baskets of leftovers. It is a miracle! God provides according to His good and gracious will.

Even today, Emmanuel, God with us, (cf: Matthew 1:23) God in the flesh, gives us this day our daily bread. Jesus did not come only to feed the hungry and make sick people well again. That would only leave them to die another day. The miracle of the feeding was to reveal that He indeed was God in the flesh of man. He comes to you in this place with forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation – which means He provides for all your needs of body and soul. He forgives you of your sins of making poor decisions and not loving your neighbor as you ought.

He exhorts you to go and sin no more. (cf: John 5:14) He does not need your good works, but your neighbor does.

Scholars have argued over the centuries whether the Feeding of the Five Thousand was the equivalent of the Lord's Supper. We have to remember that Matthew wrote His Gospel account years after the events actually happened. As Lutheran Christians, we would say that the Holy Spirit inspired Matthew to use language that foreshadows the institution of the Lord's Supper. Matthew does not want his hearers and readers to think that the Feeding of the Five Thousand *is the* Lord's Supper, but he wants us to see the theological connections. (cf: Gibbs, Matthew 11:2–20:34, Concordia Commentary, 748)

He wants us to remember God's daily provision of manna in the wilderness. Later in Mathew's Gospel he records Jesus' Words of Institution on the night when our Lord was betrayed. In this wilderness feeding, Matthew's description of how Jesus takes the food, pronounces a blessing, breaks the bread, and distributes the food for the gathered guests to eat, it anticipates Matthew's narrative of Jesus' Words of Institution in the Upper Room. (cf: Matthew 26:26–29)

Jesus has compassion on the crowds, but He is still on His way to the cross. There the multitudes will not follow. There, even His Father will forsake Him. In compassion for you and all mankind, His hands which touched and healed and fed the crowds will be pierced by nails, so that you might be saved from sin, death, and the devil. In compassion, the Father raised Him from the dead, foreshadowing your bodily resurrection on the last day.

In those days of old, Jesus provided for body and soul with simple means and miraculous ways, and He still does so today. He adopted you and gave you faith in humble means of water and His Word in Baptism. It is a miracle! He comes to you in the folly of the Gospel proclamation of Christ crucified for you. It is folly for those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18) It is a miracle! He comes to you in a small little meal, little bread and a little wine, His very body and blood, given and shed for you for forgiveness, for life, for salvation. The ordinary becomes extraordinary by His Word. It is a miracle! Early Church Father Ignatius of Antioch said that the Lord's Supper is:

“the medicine of immortality, and the antidote to prevent us from dying, but [which causes] that we should live forever in Jesus Christ.” (“The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians,” in The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, 58)

Jesus bids you to come. Come and kneel at this altar in repentant faith to receive His Supper. It is God's way of strengthening your faith and preserving you in body and soul unto life everlasting.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.