

August 6, 2017

Matthew 14:13-21: ***“Under the Father’s Care”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The opening of our Gospel lesson for this morning says that Jesus saw the crowds and had compassion on them. I don't know about you, but I always pay extra close attention to those moments in the Bible when we are given a glimpse into what is going on in Jesus' heart. The idea that Jesus has compassion on people, that he feels something for them, and further acts on this feeling, should give us tremendous comfort. He wants to help the helpless. He sees the pit we have dug for ourselves, and desires to save us from our predicament.

We learn from our lesson that God is not just concerned with our spiritual needs, but he is also concerned when we do not have any food to eat. Jesus feeds the 5000. We also come to understand that the physical situation relates to our spiritual situation. Both bring us to the human condition and a number of thoughts that are perhaps elementary, but extremely important.

First, we cannot sustain ourselves. Apart from the Lord, we are nothing and have nothing. In this life, physically speaking, the Lord graciously provides for us, but typically does so through normal processes that he has established such as seed, ground, rain, and sun that ultimately becomes food. We also note that he has given us the ability to manage these processes to some extent, but we should never lose sight of the fact that such successful management is from our Creator.

Secondly, because of our rebellion against God's love, we have messed everything up. Without Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins, we are spiritually dead in our relationship with God, and whenever we try to relate to all that he has made, we create lots of trouble (this is partially true for even the Christian because of his/her sinful flesh). In fact, all the troubles we experience in this life, whether we label them as physical or spiritual, are self-inflicted.

We can make a further distinction: some of our troubles we directly bring on ourselves, and others God must allow in our lives in order to impress upon us our desperate need for him. If it were left undisturbed in this mess, we would be quite content with ourselves and what we think we are able to get; even convincing ourselves that we are the ones who have done it all by our grand ingenuity. It would be horrible to be left in the delusion that "all is well." When the Lord allows us to face our mess as it really is, disturbing us by the consequences of sin, his good works and word, causing us to groan for food or whatever, he is shaking us out of our stupor, or even keeping us in a right relationship with him.

And that brings us to the third and final point. One Lutheran commentator has written about our Gospel lesson saying that "God in Christ has come to reestablish his rule over the creation, and he desires to restore everything that is broken or twisted or amiss and dying. All the manifestations of creation's brokenness give rise to the Savior's compassion." In other words, his compassion is so great that he will not let us be content with the way things are. Instead, he fully intends that we understand that things are really broken, twisted, amiss, and dying, so that we might see our need for help and receive it by faith here and in fullness in heaven. He empties us of ourselves and every self-reliance so that we might understand, as it says in the Psalm 124:8, that "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

Compassion is meaningless if the helpless do not see that they really need help. Moses cries out in Psalm 90:12: "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." In other words, show us the truth! Make us stare death in the face, for as long as we have to, so that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Make us see that we are dust and that we are under wrath because of sin so that we can see what pity and grace are all about and acknowledge that the Lord is our only deliver! Make us see days when we are low on food, low on money, struggling to survive. And if we must see this repeatedly or constantly in our lives to understand the gift of God in Jesus, then so be it. The cry of the Christian is, "teach us seek first the kingdom and trust that you will take care of our needs now, but more importantly, forever! And when we are not seeking first the kingdom, make us miserable so that we do!"

It is good thing to observe in our Gospel lesson that Jesus withdraws into a desolate place. As he goes, the people follow him to the same place on foot with no food. It is good to note that our Lord uses up the day in this desolate place by healing the sick until the day is nearly over. You see, the realization must set in that there is no food apart from the working of God. There is not healing of the sick apart from the Savior of the world. Or, as Peter says: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12)." Matthew gives his witness to what's next:

Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." But 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."

When the disciples say that "this is a desolate place," they might as well have been acknowledging that the whole world and universe is desolate because of sin, death, and the devil. Pulled away from what might have been their personal comfort zone, they are now forced to see things as they really are. Their initial solution is to send the people away and have them take care of themselves. But, Jesus drives home a powerful point. "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." Apart from God, people have no food, no money, no place to go. The disciples are to realize that they can't do it either. Apart from God, no disciple is going to be able to give them something to eat. They only have five loaves and two fish which are not from themselves. And Jesus says, "Bring them to me." And Matthew goes on to say:

Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Jesus has the crowd and his disciples come to him, because there is no where else to go. And when it says that Jesus looked up, we are to understand that according to his human nature, he was pointing all to the only solution to the human condition. In God, and in him alone is the good and everything that is

given that can be called good. Jesus gives the food to the disciples, and the disciples give it to the crowds. All eat and all are satisfied even to the point that there is food left over. Again, from the same Lutheran commentator (Jeffrey A. Gibbs):

It may seem odd that Matthew offers no account of a response from the disciples or from the crowds. There is no mention of astonishment or faith or praise. Matthew's hearers/readers are left to marvel on their own at the Christ, who acts the way that God acts and miraculously feeds the people. The primary message of the miracle is about the compassionate power of Jesus.

Jesus invites all to live **Under The Father's Care!** The Father is compassionate and has sent his one and only Son to compassionately reestablish his rule over the creation, restoring everything that is broken or twisted or amiss and dying. Jesus brings us to himself, acknowledges that the Father has sent him, takes all of us to the desolation of the cross, delivers us from sin, and raises us in his resurrection, thereby showing all that he is the only one who can bring both physical and spiritual satisfaction. Jesus says in Matthew 6, "Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Indeed, we are **Under The Father's Care!**

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott