

Sermon for August 27, 2017 - 12th Sunday after Pentecost*

Matthew 14:13–21 (Evangelical Heritage Version)

Theme: **The Compassionate Christ.**

- 1) *Seek Him*
- 2) *Trust Him*

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.

What do you do when you feel hurt? Do you seek help from someone or try to deal with the problem on your own? Many times the people we turn to disappoint us. How? Sometimes they don't sympathize with us like they ought. Other times they simply don't have the means or power to help.

But there is someone we can turn to when we are hurt – someone who is never too busy to listen, too self-absorbed to care, or too powerless to do anything about our problem. Yes, there is someone who is more than willing and able to help us with our hurts – regardless of their cause. Who is he? **The compassionate Christ.** Let us learn to *seek him*. Let us learn to *trust him*.

Part One: Seek him.

Our sermon text takes place toward the end of Jesus' earthly ministry – while he was in Galilee. To the shock and horror of many, Herod had put John the Baptist to death. More than that, Herod got wind of what Jesus was doing, and worried that He might be John the Baptist returned from the dead.

¹³When Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place to be alone. Understand Jesus' actions correctly. He was not afraid of Herod. Quite the contrary. From the other Gospels we learn that the disciples had just returned from mission journeys Jesus sent them

on without him. Jesus needed alone time with his disciples to discuss what they experienced, what happened to John the Baptist, and also to prepare them for what the rest of his ministry would hold.

Compassion for his disciples moved Jesus to bring them to a quiet place where he could spend quality alone time with them. And in the same compassion he calls us to retreat with him to a quiet place, where he can spend time with us. Where is that place? It's here during worship, or on Tuesday during Bible class. The quiet place to which Jesus calls us is at home when you are telling a Bible story to your kids, or simply reading the Scriptures for your own edification. That quiet place is His Word, wherever it is taught, discussed or read in faith. Through it he strengthens our trust in him, gives us hope in all trouble, and prepares us – not only for this life, but also for the life to come. Yes, Jesus is constantly calling us to come with him to a quiet place, but do we heed his call? Do we seek him out as the treasured friend and Savior that he is?

This is what the people of Galilee did. We read: *When the crowds heard this (that Jesus withdrew to a quiet place with his disciples), they followed him on foot from the towns.* Even though the crowds didn't quite understand Jesus' mission, they certainly trusted in his compassion. Carrying their sick, they walked miles to find Jesus. Why? Because they were hurting. Many in the crowd were sick. Others were lonely and needed someone to care about them. All of them were like sheep without a shepherd – harassed, helpless and in need of salvation.

¹⁴When Jesus got out of the boat, he saw a large crowd. He had compassion on them and healed their sick.

Take a moment to appreciate what the LORD does here. He originally left with his disciples to be alone with them, so that they wouldn't be bothered by the crowds. He had every reason and right to send them away. But he doesn't. Instead of being filled with annoyance, Jesus is filled with compassion. He pities them for their trials and struggles and desires to help them. Moreover, he sees an even deeper hurt that many in the crowd don't know about. He sees their sin, and how it has separated them from God.

So what does Jesus do about it? He offers physical and spiritual healing. He walks among the sick and preaches His Gospel to the multitude. Jesus' compassion moved him to help the crowd, just as it moves him to help us.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, whenever you are feeling hurt – be it emotionally, physically or spiritually - don't try to tough it out on your own. Do what the Galilean crowds did and seek Jesus. How? By calling out to him in prayer and making every effort to be where he can be found. And where can Jesus be found? He himself tells us: *where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.*ⁱⁱⁱ In other words, Jesus is wherever Christians gather in his name – ready to study his word. He is here now at Church. He is with us in Bible class. He is present with every family that sits down for a devotion. He is with every person who prayerfully meditates on the Bible. Yes, wherever the Gospel is, there you will find the compassionate Christ – ready to instruct, help, heal and restore as only he knows best.

Make every effort, therefore, to seek Jesus out. Did time, distance or sickness keep the crowds from searching for Jesus? No. Why not? Because they trusted in Christ's power and compassion to help. Let the same confidence in Christ's compassion move you to seek Christ out – regardless of the inconveniences or hardships that stand in your way. Trust in his love and power to help, for he is faithful and will keep every promise he makes.

Part Two: Trust Him

In showing compassion for the crowd, Jesus wanted to teach his disciples another important lesson: to trust in his power and care to provide as they also show compassion for those God puts before them.

From another account, we learn that when Jesus first saw the crowd, he asked one of his disciples (probably in earshot of the others) *"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.*ⁱⁱ

Do you see what Jesus was doing – asking his disciples about buying food for all these people? He wanted them to think about who he is: the divine Son of God, who rules over heaven and earth. Where would the disciples get food to feed 5000 people? Didn't they remember what Jesus did at the wedding of Cana, or the power he showed at other occasions? The best answer to Jesus' question would have been: "LORD, we can't provide for all these people, but we trust that you can. Tell us what you want us to do and we will do it – trusting in your power to provide." Sadly this isn't what they said. Instead they spend their time worrying and fretting – so much so that when evening came, they said to Jesus: *"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."*¹⁶ *But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."*

Isn't Jesus response interesting? Even though there was no possible way Jesus' disciples could do what he asked, he nevertheless laid the charge on them: you give them something to eat. It's as if he were saying: "Don't you feel the same compassion for the crowd that I feel? Don't you care that they are hungry, sick and in need of the forgiveness and salvation that only I can offer? Love them, therefore, as I love them."

But Jesus is asking the impossible! How can they even begin to feed the crowd? Left to their own resources they certainly couldn't. ¹⁷*They told him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish."* ¹⁸*"Bring them here to me," he replied.*

I want to pause here a moment and reflect on how the situation in which the disciples found themselves applies to us as a Church. We too are Jesus' disciples – tasked with sharing his love in the world. But how do we even begin to do this? We have limited money and manpower and there are so many hurting people in the world. The love Jesus asks us to show is beyond what any of us can do. And yet, he commands us to show the same compassion he showed us. How can we even begin to do it? Jesus shows us the way. First of all he asks us to bring to him what we

have – regardless of how little it is. Why? Because he will bless and use it to fulfill his purpose, as we see next.

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.

The reason the LORD asked his disciples to do the impossible was to show them his power. He wanted them to put their trust in him. This is why – taking the little they could offer – he blesses it to such a degree that it feeds a multitude.

What lesson can we Christians learn from this? Don't let limited resources cause you to worry and fret over how you can show the love God commands you to show. Trust in Christ. Does God often ask us to do more than we are able? Absolutely. But he does this to keep us from relying on ourselves – forcing us to rely on him and him alone to accomplish his work through us.

And as we, by faith, offer the LORD the little we have, we can be sure that he will use it to accomplish the great things he wants to accomplish. As the 5 pieces of bread and 2 fish show, no offering is too small for him to use for his glory. Understand why I say this. It is not to give us an “out” so as to keep God's blessings for ourselves instead of using them to help others. God knows our hearts and absolutely hates such selfishness – wanting us to repent of it. No, I say this to encourage those who are tempted to feel like their small offerings are meaningless to God. No offering offered in faith is ever meaningless. God will always bless and use the little we offer him to accomplish his good and gracious will.

Brothers and sisters in Christ. Are you hurting emotionally, physically or spiritually? Make every effort to seek the LORD – calling upon him in prayer and making every effort to meet him where he allows himself to be found. Trust in his compassion to forgive, help and instruct you. Then, having been on the receiving end of his amazing love, show compassion to others – trusting in his power and love to use the little we can offer to help many in need. Amen.

ⁱ Matthew 18:20 NIV84

ⁱⁱ John 6:5-6 NIV84