

“THE MEAL, THE MESSAGE, THE MIRACLE”

Message for the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

From Pastor Norman Staker

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ISAIAH 55: 1-5 ☸ ROMANS 9: 1-5 ☸ MATTHEW 14: 13-21

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR FATHER AND FROM
OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST. AMEN. HE IS RISEN; HE IS
RISEN INDEED!!

“When He, Jesus, went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.”

It’s a good thing that those verses weren’t written about me. It’s a good thing that thousands of people weren’t depending on Norman for their teaching and nourishment. Especially on the day when I wanted to be alone with my friends. Especially on the day that I knew I was going to be crucified. Had that been my feet in Jesus’ sandals on that beach, the verses would have read something like this:

They were like sheep without a shepherd. So Norman told them to stop grazing on his pasture and head back to their pens. When Norman landed and saw a large crowd, he mumbled something about how hard it was to get a day off. That is not a true sentiment, either! It’s a good thing that I wasn’t responsible for those people. I would have been in no mood to teach them, no mood to help them, but did Jesus? As I think about it, Jesus had no desire to be with them either. After all he did leave them. But only after he taught them many things and healed the sick.

Question? Why did Jesus teach and heal them if he needed some quiet time, as we like to call it now?

Answer: “He had compassion on them.” I

In other words Matthew in this scripture is not saying he felt simple pity or compassion for them. It was a much deeper meaning. Matthew is saying that Jesus felt their hurt in his gut.

He felt the hurt of the diseased; He felt the loneliness of the lepers; He felt the embarrassment of the sinful;

He felt the limp of the crippled.

And once he felt their hurts, he couldn't help but heal them and teach them many things. He was moved in the stomach of their needs. He was so touched by their needs he forgot his own. He was so moved that he put their hurts on his back as though he didn't have enough which he did; he had more than enough. Jesus felt compassion on them because they were the reason he came. They were HIS children. Because self was forgotten and others were served by the compassionate Savior.

I want to tell a story. But first I want to make this point. Jesus knew all too well what pain is and that's the very reason he takes as much as he can off of us. So I guess the words to the old song are true.

“What a friend we have in Jesus; oh what needless pain we bear; all because we do not carry, everything to God in Prayer.”

Jesus knows how you feel. When you struggle, He listens. When you desire, he responds. He's there for you now. He is there for you now.

Like the little boy in the story he sees you with a heart of compassion. He knows that you are special. And it's not our story from Matthew today.

A boy went into a pet shop to buy a puppy. He looked and looked. He told the owner that he would be back with the money to buy the puppy in a couple of weeks. During those weeks he worked so hard. Washing cars, mowing lawns, doing chores around the house. Finally he had the money. The next day he went back to the pet shop. He picked out a puppy that was crippled and he walked up to the store owner. He handed him the money. When the owner saw the puppy he picked, he told him to go pick another puppy because this puppy would never be able to play or run because it was crippled. The boy just smiled and said he was sure this is the puppy he wanted and that it was just the puppy for him. As the boy walked out, the owner started to say something but remained silent. Suddenly he knew why the boy had picked that puppy because he saw extending out of the boy's trousers a brace on his leg.

Why did the boy want the dog?

The same reason Jesus wants us, he knew how it felt and he also knew that we were very special.

Some words of comfort: My God shall supply all your needs; I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me; Jesus doesn't leave you...His words ring loud and clear. Then there's 'And lo I am with you even to the ends of the earth' and finally 'I will never leave you or forsake you.'

Sometimes God seems like a last second God, but it is with those fractions of a second left that we truly see His glory revealed, for "in our weakness His strength is made perfect."

Listen again as I share a few words from our Gospel today: 'When Jesus heard what had happened, (that is the execution of John the Baptist) he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. Notice that apparently because Jesus was human, as well as divine, He sometimes wanted privacy. Herod's sudden interest in Jesus' ministry no doubt concerned Him. He wanted to get away from the people and all the demands which they put on Him. But, when a crowd manages to find Him, He doesn't become angry. Instead, He has compassion on those folks and heals those who are sick. 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." You've heard me say every time this miracle is read that it's the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels. And today we hear those disciples appoint themselves as the board of directors over Jesus. They're trying to tell Jesus what to do. As the afternoon wore on, the disciples realized they could be facing a big problem. There is a huge group of people and there doesn't seem to be any food around. Everyone is no doubt getting hungry and the disciples have a very practical solution. Send the crowds away. It is time to end the service and dismiss the folks so they can go get their own food. But, verse 16 Jesus replied, "They need not go away; You give them something to eat." To us and especially to the disciples, it sounded like an impossible command. No, you give them something to eat.

Now, I have a feeling that Jesus was maybe giving His disciples a hard time. He knew that they did not have the ability to feed the crowd and, as John's Gospel says, 'Jesus already had in mind what He was going to do to feed everyone.'

Matthew is sort of like Readers' Digest; he gives us a condensed report and omits the reaction of the disciples to Jesus' suggestion. Again John's gospel tells us that Philip responded, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Incidentally, if we try to translate it into our currency, Philip is figuring that they would need at least a dollar a person to give everyone just a snack, maybe a cheeseburger or something. But at currency rates of 2000 years ago, a dollar would have bought a lot more food. Matthew also omits Jesus' next statement, where He asks, "How much food do we have?" According to the other gospels, the disciples then kind of surveyed the crowd. Peter comes back and reports that he found a boy who had five barley loaves and two small fish. Matthew says Jesus was told "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." Jesus then asks that the boy's lunch be brought to Him. 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 who tried to be the Board of Directors in giving orders to Jesus were now turned into waiters to serve all those people! Jesus seems to have a very organized plan, and it works.

This is obviously a remarkable story. So remarkable, in fact, that many folks ask, "Did it really happen?"

Having five loaves and two fishes is typical of the sad state of the church in our day. Even today, folks are saying to send the multitudes away, that there are natural ways of caring for their needs. We send folks to the psychiatrist for emotional help and to the government for physical relief. We do have spiritual bread to offer, but how far will five wafers and a small glass of wine or grape juice go. We need the power of the Lord. We fail to realize that the solutions today are not in government or in human involvement but in God. Liberal Bible teachers have suggested that what really occurred was that the boy's willingness to share his lunch inspired others in the crowd to do the same. So, when everyone shared their food and ate only what they needed, there were twelve baskets left over. The big lesson then would be that we should share with those in need. Now, that is a great idea, but it is not what the story is about, because it is not what happened. All four gospels tell us the same thing. Jesus fed about 15,000 people with only five loaves of bread and two small fish. Yes, our modern scientific orientation makes it hard for us to swallow that, but that attitude is the only reason someone would suggest that the people simply shared their lunches that day. Liberal Bible teachers have tried to remove the miraculous from the gospels, giving natural explanations for the different miracles Jesus performed, in order to make these stories more palatable to folks living in the 21st Century. As we continue in year 26 of the 21st

Century, however, more and more people are realizing that if we eliminate the miracles, we rob these stories of their power and even their meaning. The Bible clearly teaches, and I choose to believe, that Jesus actually took one little boy's lunch and fed about 15,000 folks that day.

Don't get the impression that these five loaves were great big buns. They were actually little buns and 2 very small sardine like fish and that fed some 15000 people who were hungry. And the leftover scraps weren't just the garbage pieces that someone didn't finish; these were 12 baskets of food that were not touched and yet the people were satisfied; they had eaten their fill. In a day when most people never knew what it was to have a full meal, twelve baskets left over indicates that everyone had a full tummy.

I believe one of the main reasons the gospel writers report this event is that it clearly shows us two essential aspects of Jesus' character. These are two qualities which we usually don't think belong together, but in Jesus they are a magnificent combination. First is Jesus' compassion. Jesus loves people, He cares about them. We noted that earlier when we saw how even when He was seeking privacy, He could not turn down the opportunity to heal and help people. Here, as He is very busy teaching and ministering to a huge crowd, Jesus is still concerned about the very practical needs of the people around Him.

Secondly, we also see Jesus' power. In our world the compassionate are usually not powerful, and the powerful are usually not compassionate. But Jesus is both. His power is very obvious in our text today. He simply takes five loaves of bread and two fish and turns them into a meal for a huge crowd. Not only does everyone get something to eat, there are leftovers. How did He do it? I have no idea. There is no natural explanation.

Some of you have added a little water to the soup so you could feed a couple of unexpected guests at dinner, but Jesus does something very different. It was a miracle. It was another demonstration of His supernatural power. Jesus had the ability to do remarkable things.

As the story goes on, we see there is no limit to Jesus' willingness to do this. The ultimate need of human beings is some way to be saved from the results of sin and eternal death. As human beings, we need someone who will rescue us from our wretched condition of being separated from God and without hope. Jesus is willing to do that. He is willing to give up His own life as a sacrifice of atonement. The angel told Joseph that the baby will be called Jesus "because he will save his

people from their sins." He did that by dying on the cross in our place. He suffered agony, pain, and the horrors of death itself for me and for you. He did that because it was the Father's will, and also because of the great compassion, the great love, He has for people. We catch a glimpse of that compassion in our story today.

What I think we need to do today is just sit back, or stand back, in awe of Jesus Christ. I was a small child when I first heard the story of Jesus feeding the 5000. I remember wondering whether or not I would have been willing to give my lunch to Jesus, like that little boy was. Even then, I valued my meals quite a bit. I am sure I heard the story frequently during those early Sunday School years, but to be honest, since that time I have not really thought about it that often. Yet, it is such a great story because it shows Jesus' compassion and power so clearly. Folks, this morning I feel like my words have been very feeble, but I hope God's Spirit has used them in your mind and heart to give you a fresh sense of the compassion and power that are found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.