

Matthew 14:13-21

They All Ate and Were Satisfied

Pentecost 10

August 1, 2 2020

Prince of Peace Topeka

Our text begins just after the announcement of John the Baptist's death. Not only were Jesus and John related as cousins, but their ministries were also intimately related. John had prepared the way for Jesus. Now John had died – and certainly John's death caused Jesus to ponder his own. Jesus retreated to a place by himself.

History has given us many examples of military retreats that eventually turned the tide of war. Some of those retreats have become kernels of our strength and our faith as a nation. For example, George Washington's retreat to Valley Forge proved to be a building block of determination for his troops. They gained the strength they needed to face the looming cloud of possible defeat. Instead of defeat they won the war.

I am sure that many times during World War II, our leaders wondered if the war would be won. The early bleak months of 1942 were filled with dread. Japan was capturing islands in the Pacific, while Germany seemed to be undefeatable. Yet, it was during that time our nation pulled together. This new unity soon proved to be the wall of determination for victory.

What about Spiritual retreats? Be it church camps, LWML rallies, LLL Conventions, Saints Alive over 55 or Youth Gatherings or just private time alone with God; there has to be a time for a person to retreat and take inventory of his or her life.

Jesus retreated to consider where he was at in his ministry. Jesus knew that as John's life had led to death – Jesus life was headed in the same direction. Jesus certainly had much to ponder.

In the midst of his retreat came the interruption of needy people. People spotted Jesus as he came ashore. They brought their sick and dying.

How many of us have had our retreat times intruded upon? Be it the intrusion of children during your bubble bath, phone calls in the midst of a quiet dinner or neighbors coming over on your day off.

I know that when I was a young pastor, I thought I was often interrupted. Sometimes it seemed that the only way to get some work done was to leave the office and go home. I was reminded, however, by a retired Pastor that the interruptions ARE the ministry.

Jesus seemed to know that already. The text says he had compassion for them. Compassion is often translated as pity. It is better interpreted as mercy. Mercy implies action and the older word 'compassion' also shows active involvement. Jesus did something about the interruptions.

Jesus became involved with those gathered. Even though they had intruded into his time for reflection, he showed compassion, mercy on them. The text tells us that Jesus healed their sick. How long this took we are not sure, but he worked and labored with them.

I would imagine that part of this healing was also his teaching. Jesus took the time to speak to their inner needs, telling them about the Kingdom of God that was breaking in upon them.

THEN EVENING CAME...the text implies it was time for the people to leave. The disciples reminded Jesus that those gathered had best leave if they were going to get home in time for their

evening meal. Now this comment was made with full concern, yet with a touch of doubt, for they did not expect Jesus to do anything more for them.

Unlike our culture, which has electric lighting, the ancient depended on the daylight hours. Their entire custom was to work as long as possible, not wasting a minute of the precious light. People got up just before daybreak and usually went straight to work, with little or nothing to eat. Laborers in the field, or other complicated jobs, would sometimes take bread, cheese and maybe some figs as a quick sustainer, but not a full breakfast as we do in our day. The only time when any type of lunch was offered was around noon, but only small servings. Therefore, the evening meal was when meat was served, and then it was usually fish.

Jesus reminded his disciples of their obligation, as hosts, to feed those gathered. Hospitality was a highly held value in Hebrew tradition. The disciples quickly recovered from their shock at his suggestion, to remind Jesus that they only had five loaves and two fish. Jesus, not being put off by such a defeated comment, ordered that the people be seated on the grass. Next came the great miracle.

Jesus did something, which can never be explained, to produce an abundance of food for all those gathered. He had turned that desolate and lonely place into a fulfillment of God's promise. As God had provided manna in the wilderness for those who had followed Moses, so now Jesus was shown to be greater than Moses. The meal was more than enough – it met the needs of the evening meal.

The text says that they were satisfied. It implies only the meal, but in reality it was more; it was a bonding of the people to Jesus. Ancient meals were signs of closeness and fellowship. The breaking of bread together was a serious thing.

We know that to be true in our own experience. There is a closeness that comes in being at the table together. We all missed social gatherings and gathering together to take the Lord's Supper this winter.

It is this very body and blood that has purchased and won for us the forgiveness of sins. It is this forgiveness that is the source of a retreat's comfort.

A word to our confirmands. This is a weird time of the year to be confirmed. We have had to wait weeks and weeks so that it would be safer to gather than it might have been when we planned this in May. Sometimes we refer to Christian instruction as feeding you from God's word. Sometimes by the time we get through confirmation instruction we may think we are fed full. But in reality you have merely snacked for a while on the word of God. **In order for your faith to stay strong you have to continue feasting** upon God's Word and His Sacraments often.

Just as Jesus cared for the bodies and souls of those he healed and fed on his time of retreat, Jesus cares for our bodies and souls on this day of retreat. We come to this place each week – on the day of Jesus' resurrection – to be fed, to be cured and to be forgiven.

May we walk away from this feast as healed and satisfied as those who lived in Jesus' day. Amen.