

Proper 13 (A)
Pastor Ed Harkey

Matthew 14:13-21 (22-23a)
TLC, Keene, NH

[OPENING SLIDE]

G.W.D.I.G.W.W.N.L.G.S.¹

“Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.”

Introduction

[SLIDE #2] The statue sits across the street, and just beyond the memorial of the 168 people who died, when a couple of homegrown terrorists bombed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. For those who have been there, no doubt you were deeply moved by the memorial fence, decorated with teddy bears and notes of well-wishers from around the world. Or perhaps it was the 168 empty chairs that sit just above the “pool of tears.”

Where just beyond that memorial is a statue, an image of a white-robed Christ, who stands with his back to the busy street, and the place where the federal building once stood. There Jesus faces the 168 empty spaces, with head bowed, covering his face with one hand, while he weeps. [Adapted from Lois Johnson, *Either Way, I Win*, in *PI*, pp. 35f]

[SLIDE #3] Compassion ... it’s what moves the heart of God ... not only to look upon this world’s misery, but then to act. And act He does! Where in the greatest act of compassion God sends His one and only Son to be the Savior of the world.

Main Thought: It is that compassion that finds its way to us, bestowing God’s gifts, then calling us dispense them to others. In so leading us, He does not leave us empty handed.

¹ For other possible approaches, see John 6.1.03; Hartung, *CJ*, April 2005, 181-182; Nunes, “Taking, Blessing, Breaking, Giving,” *CPR*, 15:3, 41-42, 71; Mark 6.30.09; also accompanying Bible study [Matthew 14.13.20]

[SLIDE #4]

GOD'S WORK DONE IN GOD'S WAY WILL NEVER LACK GOD'S SUPPLY.

Amen.

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The feeding of the 5,000 ... the only miracle in Jesus' ministry [outside the resurrection] that is found in all four Gospels [Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14]. As they say in advertising: it takes several times for folks to be hit with the message of your product before they buy in. What's the "buy in" for us? What does our Savior want us to know? What does He want us to do?

[SLIDE #5] Work from your rest.

¹³ ***Now when Jesus heard this*** [the news regarding His cousin, John the Baptist's, death], ***he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place*** [most likely on the NE shore of Galilee near Bethsaida²] ***by himself*** [to grieve, pray, and take stock of His own lonely trek to the Cross]. ***But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns.***

While in this instance, Jesus and disciples don't get to ... the fact is not lost that practically before every major decision, and at other times in the midst of the fray, Jesus headed for the hills. Most likely here, it was to grieve, but also to rest (says Mark).³ Wherein, this is where God can work best – from our rest in Him and His grace – before setting off on the work He has for us to do. Here, in His presence, we gain the strength to work, which I at the heart of the Sabbath – wherein, fed on God's Word and Sacrament, we do nothing, and God does *everything* ... forgiving our sin, feeding our soul, setting us on solid ground, wherein:

[SLIDE #6] Out of that rest then comes our work.

² See Mark 6:32 and Luke 9:10; *The Lutheran Study Bible (TOSB)*, 1612

³ As Mark notes that the disciples have just returned from a mission and Jesus invites them to withdraw and rest.

¹⁴ When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them [i.e. He was moved as to His most inward parts⁴] and healed their sick.

Part of what makes this story so enduring is that it speaks to what God calls us to, offering the right motivation for doing it – namely, “*compassion.*” That is, we don’t serve others on the basis of their skin color or economic situation. Far too much sinful judgment by God’s people has denied the church of far too loving service in Jesus’ name.

But compassion is what the Bride of Christ does best. Yes, although holding this miracle to be unique to Jesus, the church accepts compassion as obligatory for Jesus’ disciples. Wherein, there is “no scene more generative of compassion than that of hungry men, women, and children.” To be sure, we’ve not always done it sufficiently or consistently, but for 20 centuries, the people of God, out of Christ’s compassion to them, have demonstrated compassion to others. And what does it say that Jesus’s question, “What did you do in the face of human hunger?” will be on our final exam [Matthew 25:35].” [Craddock, et. al. *Preaching through the Christian Year*, A, 391]

Of course, it is not the Law that stirs us to action, but rather the Gospel, where the expression of Christian kindness flows from the compassion we ourselves have received in Christ – and still receive by means of His Word and Sacrament. “*Freely you have received,*” Jesus once told His disciples, “*now freely give.*”

Wherein, such a supply of God’s grace, in turn shows our own lack of supply, but then shows us that ...

[SLIDE #7] In Jesus our needs – both spiritual and physical – find their sufficiency.

⁴ “Outside the original parables of Jesus there is no instance of the word being used of men.” [Graudin, *CJ*, July 1996, 305, a la *TDNT*, 7:553]

“My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” [Philippians 4:19]

¹⁵ 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.” ¹⁶ But Jesus said, “They need not go away; you [with an emphasis on you] give them something to eat.”

In John’s account of this event we’re told that Jesus presents a question to Philip and the disciples as to how they would feed such a large crowd. Already knowing what He would do, Jesus’ question was a test of the disciples’ faith [John 6:5-7].

Wherein, when Jesus says, with emphasis, *“You give them something to eat,”* the disciples’ [as also our own] lack of supply is exposed. *“Not by my own reason or strength,”* we confess. Wherein, the accounts of old, at times, convict us. Yes, did not God rain down manna from heaven on His people– for forty years? Did not the jar of a widow never diminished? Had Jesus Himself not just foreshadowed such abundance when He blessed a wedding party with 180 gallons of the finest of wines?!!!

Children of God, we often spend far too much time reflecting on what we don’t have, or what we can’t do, so betraying our hearts, exposing our lack of faith.

¹⁷ “We have only five loaves here and two fish.” They said to Him.

Where, only in Jesus are all of our needs graciously met.

¹⁸ And he said, “Bring them here to Me.”

[SLIDE #8] Wherein, in the [soon-to-be scarred and outstretched] hands of the Savior, what we lack is met with mercy ... where, even one little drop of mercy is enough.

¹⁹ 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.

[SLIDE #9] One of my life quotes is: “God can fight His battles with broken swords.” Where, even before Anduril was re-forged, the blade once broken was able to defeat Sauron the first time. [It’s a Lord of the Rings thing!] But a joyous reminder that even the most fractured of souls in the Savior’s loving hands are blessed for service. Yes, recognizing Jesus for Who *He is* brings hope and salvation – a hope and salvation that, like fragments of bread, can be multiplied and shared with joy and thanksgiving.

“Give us this day, our daily bread.”

We confidently pray. Where, in the catalogue of what’s involved in that prayer, *The Small Catechism* points us to not only the abundance of God’s riches, but also how intertwined and dependent we are on each other to not only receive such bread, but to give it.

Where that prayer, and God’s physical acts of grace are but a “dress rehearsal” for:

“On the night in which He was betrayed, Jesus TOOK bread ... GAVE thanks ... BROKE it, and GAVE it to His disciples ...”

This is more than mere symbolism ... but a sign, indicating that out of *His* rest, *His* compassion, *His* supply, Jesus rises to meet all of our needs. All graciously given, just before ...

[SLIDE #10] He sends us out – with His gifts – to serve.

Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰ And they all ate and were satisfied.

Yes, note the sacred rhythm here: “[Jesus] broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples [it’s all one way here – a rendering of His Divine Service to His people] ... “and the disciples [then] gave them to the crowds” [as they, in turn render Divine service back to God and to those they are called to serve].

It’s a beautiful arrangement, where we take what our Lord graciously gives, and then dispense His gifts to others. His work, our hands. Yes, the disciples are only table waiters here ... but *necessary* waiters ... like you and me.

Child of God, rejoice to have a part in this. That while He most certainly could distribute His gifts *without* us, in His infinite care for this planet He’s chosen *not* to, where we, like the disciples, get to relish in the joyous “leftovers” of sharing the “Bread of Life” with the world. So may we – in deed and in word.

Conclusion

And so, our call to serve ... that the One who fed the crowds with meager supply of food is the One who still says to us:

[SLIDE #11]

“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price ... Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.” [Isaiah 55:1-2]

Not only have we come to know this , by means of the **rest** that He gives, the **compassion** that He shows, and the **supply** that He provides – all graciously enfolded and presented to us by means of in His Word and Sacrament – but it is now our joyful privilege to **serve** ... all the while pointing others to the blessed truth:

[SLIDE #12]

GOD’S WORK DONE IN GOD’S WAY WILL NEVER LACK GOD’S SUPPLY.

Amen.