

August 2, 2020

Matthew 14:13-21:

“The Care of His Cross”

- I. Is About Compassion
- II. Moves Us Beyond This World.
- III. To Seek and Save.

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 N. Oakland Avenue
Decatur Illinois 62526

St. Matthew 14:13-21

Dear Friends in Christ,

After first reading the text for this morning, I found myself once again thinking back many years ago when a man rang our doorbell, and when I opened the door he introduced himself as pastor "somebody" and asked if he could talk to us about Jesus. I don't remember his name or the name of his congregation because as soon as I heard the title "pastor" the "talk" was over. I told him, "I don't believe in Jesus and I don't believe in paid clergy!" and shut the door.

Of all the things I love, I love Jesus most of all and the fact that He loved me first - in spite of myself. And if you don't mind me stating it this way, the second thing I love most is the fact that He still loves me - in spite of myself. I can't fully grasp either one of those points, especially when I consider the reality of where I was and the sin that is still there.

A. W. Tozer wrote, "Christ has a habit of inserting a corkscrew into one's heart and then pulling back and forth. You soon discover Christ is around! If He is being personal with us, He brings to the surface in our thinking those inner pollutants that need the care of His cross." Well, that's the direction we're headed . . .

THE CARE OF HIS CROSS

I. Is About Compassion.

Listen, once again, to these words of the Lord to Adam: "...cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it...By the sweat of your face you shall eat...you are dust and to dust you shall return." (Gen. 3:17b,19) What I think about is how much pain and sweat we expend in order to reduce or eliminate pain and sweat. We pain and sweat to get rid of pain and sweat! And what we earn for all our efforts is the promise that we will become a pile of dust! Positive thinking has its place, but only in the context of God's love and direction through Christ. Consider the opening words of our text:

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore he saw great crowds, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. (vv. 13-14)

I'd guess some would ask, "What was it Jesus heard that caused Him to withdraw to a desolate place?" If we back up a few verses from our text we're told, "(Herod) had John beheaded in the prison, and his head was brought on a platter..." (Matt. 14:10-11) And prior to that we're told that the leaders of the synagogue "took offense at him (at Jesus)" because of His teaching and works. And prior to that He healed a man with a shriveled hand on the Sabbath and, as a result, we're told, "...the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him." (Matt 12:14)

Talk about negative - constant upheaval! And yet, we're told, when "he saw great crowds...he had compassion on them." And while some might understand compassion as simply feeling sorrowful for others, it is defined as "sympathetic concern for the suffering of another together with the inclination to give aid or support to show mercy." The compassion of Jesus is not simply inclined to do something, but does something and shows great mercy. Note the contrast between the disciples and Jesus:

II. Moves Us Beyond This World.

Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is 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." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and two fishes, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied. (vv. 15-20a)

The disciples were finished and could see no further than the worldly provision. God sees everything beyond this world and moves everything in that direction. *The care of the cross* moves us beyond this world.

The account of the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is also found in the sixth chapter of St. John. After the miracle John reports, "When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, 'This indeed is the Prophet who is to come into the world.'" (v.14) Along with the disciples, the people saw the mission of Jesus this way: Set-up a wonderful kingdom on earth and feed the belly! It's the way a lot of people see Jesus today. John reports, "Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew..." (v.15) "King by force" - that is, a bread king.

Ultimately, the crowd caught up with Jesus and Jesus said to them, "...you are seeking me, not because you saw signs (that is, signs that demonstrate He is God in the flesh who forgives sin and opens the door to eternal life) but because you ate your fill of the loaves." (Jn. 6:26) And Jesus warned them as He warns all who labor for **this world's stuff** - all of which goes away: "Do not work for food that perishes, but for food that endures to eternal life..." (Jn. 6:27a) The object of life is not an obsession to get and grab a bunch of stuff. Our stuff won't excite us when they stick a couple of IV's in our arms and an oxygen mask over our face - when the diagnosis reads: You have X number of days to see the sunrise. And it won't make any difference what your age is. "Work for food that endures to eternal life!" That's the issue: eternal life!

And the people asked, "What must we do to be doing the works of God?" (v. 28) It always comes down to that: *What must we do?* And Jesus answered, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." (v. 29) And that statement is connected to this from Jesus: "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." (v. 40)

But understand this, Jesus goes on to say, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him..." (Jn. 6:44) Let's put it together - "everyone who believes in him should have eternal life" is dependent on this: "No one can come to me (no one is able to believe) unless the Father...draws him." And, again, He referred to it as "This is the work of God." *The Care Of His Cross* entered your life - my life - with the most astounding miracle: God working faith in us that lays hold on Christ for forgiveness and eternal life. It is as the Scriptures teach: "even when we were dead in our trespasses, (God) made us alive together with Christ." (Eph. 2:5) We didn't make ourselves alive. God did!

III. To Seek and Save.

Do you remember Zacchaeus? Luke tells us, "He was a chief tax collector and was rich." (Lk. 19:2) He was a man with few, if any friends because tax collectors would exploit people. When Jesus was passing through Zacchaeus' home territory we're told that Zacchaeus "was seeking to see who Jesus was." (Lk. 19:3) Jesus ultimately entered his home and we're told, "And when they (the people) saw it, they all grumbled, 'He has gone in to be the guest of a sinner.'" (v.7) But Zacchaeus' life was turned upside down in the most wonderful of ways, just as yours and mine were. "And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.'" (vv. 9-10)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this is where The Feeding of the Five Thousand takes us: To our Lord Jesus; the one who grants eternal life! He is the Bread of Life! And we are children of Abraham, as Scriptures teach: "Know then that it is those of faith who are sons of Abraham." (Gal. 3:7)

I have quoted the following from Martin Luther a couple of times over the years; it's something I have re-read many times over the years. Here's a piece from it:

It is the nature of God that he makes something out of nothing. Consequently, if something is not nothing, God can make nothing out of him....Thus God accepts no one except the abandoned...makes no one wise except the foolish, and in short, has mercy upon no one except the wretched, and gives no one grace except those who have not grace.

You can argue with me, but running with and after this world always ends in...well...death. Nothing! March 2020 and what has unfolded with it will stand as horrific reminders of how precarious everything of this world is! The *what's to come* has some big question marks attached to it. But Christ comes to feed us His love, forgiveness and eternal life. We can feast on His Word, or starve to death on the obvious uncertainties and gross disappointments of this world. Let's say with the Psalmist:

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.
Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. (Ps. 119:103-105)

You see? Life is about *The Care Of His Cross*.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott