

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Our Bible reading focus comes from our Gospel in Matthew 14.

Dear Friends in Christ,

How long have you been coming to church? How many years? Maybe it's as many years as you've been alive. Maybe you've been coming to church for as long as you can remember. Or maybe this is the first time in a long time that you've been in worship. Whatever the case, this is all very commendable, because you are doing exactly what the disciples were doing, which is following Jesus.

In Matthew 4, right before Jesus calls His first disciples, John the Baptist is arrested and thrown into prison. And in Matt. 4:19, Jesus said to Peter and Andrew, **Follow Me**. Now, around a year has passed. John is still in prison. The disciples are still following Jesus. But in Matthew 14:1-12 (just before our Gospel reading) we are told about the death of John the Baptist. That is right where verse 13 picks up. The death of John the Baptist is what Jesus heard and caused Him to **withdraw from there in a boat to a desolate place by Himself**.

We react to bad news in similar ways. When we learn of really hard, sad news. We don't like to be surrounded by a crowd of people and tell everyone what's happening. We like to be alone or with our close family members. We want to have time to process and mourn what has just taken place.

This is exactly what Jesus was doing. He's going to a desolate place, with His disciples. But the crowds watch the boat from the shore, and they are following along the shoreline to see where Jesus was going. Verse 14, **When (Jesus) went ashore He saw a great crowd, and He had compassion on them and healed their sick**. This is the first miracle in the account of the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus had compassion on the people.

He's looking to have some alone time, time with His disciples. Time in prayer. Time to mourn the death of John the Baptist. And yet, here is a large crowd of people. I know I would have a temptation, and I think you would to, to see the large crowd of people, get back into the boat and go somewhere else. We'd have a temptation to want to be alone, to not deal with someone else's problems when you're dealing with your own. We would want to get back into the boat and go somewhere else.

But God doesn't work that way. Jesus doesn't work that way. Jesus sees the large crowd of people. And He is moved by them. He sees their sick. He sees their pain, He sees their suffering, and having compassion, He stays with them and He heals them.

Sometimes people are afraid to just give me (Pastor Josh) a call, because you're afraid you'll inconvenience me. You think I might be too busy. You don't want to bother me. And I'm a mere man, just like you, I just have a title and responsibility of being your pastor. My love and care for you is the same, whether I'm busy or not. And yet, how much more, when we think of Jesus. Jesus, who is far beyond, greater than you and me. Jesus who has WAY more responsibility than us. Jesus not only makes time, He Himself, God in the flesh, has compassion on and for you.

God sees you, in your situation, and He doesn't withdraw. He comes near. Which is why God sent His Son, Jesus, in the flesh. God comes to us, to serve us. To lay down His life for us. This is God's compassion, **while we were still sinners, Christ died for us** (Rom. 5:8).

Notice what's happening in our Bible reading. Jesus, full of compassion, is spending time with the crowd, healing the sick. And this is no small crowd, we're told in verse 21, **about five thousand men, besides women and children**. Around 5,000 men plus however many women and children were present. Easily a crowd of 10,000, most likely much more than that. 15,000+ That's a lot of people for Jesus to stop and visit. That's a lot of people for Jesus to see and hear and heal.

And notice again, why this is the first miracle of this reading. If everyone in Denison were standing in the middle of uptown, wanting to talk to you. You'd be overwhelmed. You'd think there is no possible way you will be able to talk to all of them and help them. And yet, driven by compassion that is exactly what we see Jesus doing. He stays.

Now notice what the disciples are up to. Verse 15, **Now when it was evening, the disciples came to Jesus 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."** The disciples are saying, we have a problem here! We are in the middle of nowhere! Since they all want to see Jesus, they're not thinking ahead. There aren't any hotels or fast food places or grocery stores nearby. They're in the middle of nowhere. Let's send them away now, so we don't have to deal with any grumbling later.

That's another temptation we have. What do we want to do with someone else's problem? Not make it our own! It's their problem. And because it's their problem, send them away and let them deal with it. But Jesus said in verse 16, **They need not go away; you give them something to eat.**

Come on disciples, you step up and solve the problem. If you are pretending to care for them, by thinking, send them away now so they can get something to eat. Why don't you really show you care for them, and give them something to eat? And now the disciples get really nervous. **We have only five loaves here and two fish.** We don't even have enough to feed the 13 of us. There's no way we have enough to feed this whole crowd.

Then taking the loaves and fish, **Jesus looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then He broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over.**

What's striking is what Jesus told the disciples, **you feed them.** That is exactly what happened, the disciples were the ones feeding the people. And the miracle didn't come from the disciples' obedience to Jesus. The miracle came from Jesus multiplying the bread and fish for all to eat. The disciples were simply doing what Jesus told them to do. **You feed them.**

Just like the disciples, we are really good at following Jesus. We are really good at sitting and watching Jesus do all of the work. But when Jesus says, **You feed them.** You, now go and have compassion and help the people you see. Now, just like the disciples, we start to get really nervous and think, we can't. I don't know how. I don't have enough supplies. I don't know what to say. I don't have enough time. And the excuse list can go on for days...

Just like Jesus, what do we need? To have compassion for people. To see people, where they are, what they're facing, and like Jesus, to have compassion. To spend time with them. And more than just sitting and listening, also to feed them, both physically and spiritually.

This is why I asked, how long have you been coming to church? How many years? How many times have you heard about Jesus' love and forgiveness? How many times have you seen through the eyes of the eyewitness accounts of Jesus' compassion and love and patience and forgiveness with people? How many times have you seen and heard that Jesus died on the cross and rose again from the dead, giving you and me all of God's promises? How many times have you heard that heaven is your eternal home, all because of Jesus!

Now, **you feed them.** Just like the disciples, as you have been fed and given the Word and promises of God. Go and feed people. As you see people that are hurting and struggling, you and I have the same joy of Jesus. To help them physically, and even better, to feed them spiritually. To tell someone, in Christ Jesus, your sins are forgiven. Imagine the joy in telling someone, in Christ Jesus, you are a child of God. In Christ Jesus, heaven is your eternal home. Imagine, you are able to help someone else become baptized and part of God's family for eternity!

We are not just spectators, following and watching Jesus. Or watching someone else to do the work. We are active disciples. Full of compassion and actively helping people. Physically and spiritually feeding them. In Jesus' name. Amen.