

Sermon for August 6, 2023 – The 10th Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 14:13–21 (EHV)

Theme: **The Compassionate Christ.**

- 1) Seek Him
- 2) Trust Him

¹³When Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place to be alone. When the crowds heard this, they followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴When Jesus got out of the boat, he saw a large crowd. He had compassion on them and healed their sick. ¹⁵When evening came, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place and the hour is already late. Send the crowds away, so that they can go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” ¹⁶But Jesus said to them, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.” ¹⁷They told him, “We have here only five loaves and two fish.” ¹⁸“Bring them here to me,” he replied. ¹⁹Then he instructed the people to sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves and the two fish. After looking up to heaven, he blessed them. He broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples. The disciples gave the food to the people. ²⁰They all ate and were filled. They picked up twelve basketfuls of what was left over from the broken pieces. ²¹Those who ate were about five thousand men, not even counting women and children.

Are you afraid to talk to someone when you feel down, depressed, or hurt? If so, why? Is it because you are scared they may not understand or empathize with you as they ought? Perhaps you're afraid they don't have the power or means to help, so what's the point?

Be that as it may, there is someone you can always turn to when you hurt – someone who is never too busy to listen, too self-absorbed to care, or too powerless to do anything about your problem regardless of its cause. Who is he? **The compassionate Christ.** Let us learn to *seek him*. Let us learn to *trust him*.

Part One: Seek Him.

Our sermon text takes place toward the end of Jesus' earthly ministry – while he was in Galilee. To the shock of many, Herod had put John the Baptist to death. More than that, Herod got wind of what Jesus was doing and worried that He might be John the Baptist who returned from the dead.

¹³When Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place to be alone. Understand Jesus' actions correctly: he did not flee to a deserted place because he feared Herod. Quite the contrary. From the other Gospels, we learn that the disciples had just returned from mission journeys upon which Jesus sent them without him. Jesus needed alone time with his

disciples to discuss what they experienced, what happened to John the Baptist, and to prepare them for what the rest of his ministry would hold.

Compassion for his disciples moved Jesus to bring them to a quiet place where he could spend quality alone time with them. And, with the same compassion, he calls us to retreat to a quiet place where he can spend time with us. Where is that place? It's here during worship or Bible class. The quiet place to which Jesus calls us is also at home when you have a devotion with your family or read the Bible for your own edification. The quiet place to which our Saviour invites us is His Word and Sacraments. Through these means, he strengthens our trust in him, gives us hope in all trouble, and prepares us not only for this life but also for the life to come. Yes, Jesus constantly calls us to go with him to a quiet place, but do we heed his call? Do we seek him out as the treasured friend and Saviour that he is?

That is what the people of Galilee did. We read: *When the crowds heard this* (that Jesus withdrew to a quiet place with his disciples), *they followed him on foot from the towns*. Even though the crowds didn't fully understand Jesus' mission, they trusted his compassion. Carrying their sick, they walked miles to find Jesus. Why? Because they were hurting. Many in the crowd were ill. Others were lonely and needed someone to care for them. All of them were like sheep without a shepherd – harassed, helpless and in need of salvation.

¹⁴When Jesus got out of the boat, he saw a large crowd. He had compassion on them and healed their sick.

Take a moment to appreciate what Jesus did. He originally left with his disciples so the crowds wouldn't bother them. He had every reason to send them away, but he didn't. Instead of being filled with frustration, Jesus is filled with compassion. He pities and desires to help them with their physical hurts. Moreover, he sees an even deeper harm that many in the crowd didn't recognize in themselves. He saw their sins' guilt and how it separated them from God.

So, what does Jesus do about it? He offers physical and spiritual healing. He walks among the sick and preaches His Gospel to the multitude. Jesus' compassion moved him to help the crowd, just as it moves him to help us.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, whenever you are feeling emotionally, physically, or spiritually hurt, don't try to tough it out on your own. Do what the Galilean crowd did and seek Jesus. How? By calling to him in prayer and making every effort to be where he can be found. And where can Jesus be found? He tells us in the Bible: *where two or three have gathered together in my name, there I am among them.*"ⁱⁱ In other words, Jesus is wherever Christians gather in his name – ready to listen to his word. He is here now in worship. He will be with us in Bible class. He is present with every family that sits down for a devotion. He is with every person who prayerfully meditates on the Bible. Yes, wherever the Gospel is, you will find the compassionate Christ – ready to instruct, help, heal, and restore as only he knows best.

Make every effort, therefore, to seek Jesus out. Did time, distance or sickness keep the crowds from searching for Jesus? No. Why not? Because they trusted in His power and compassion to help. Let the same confidence in Christ's compassion move you to seek Christ out – regardless of the inconveniences or hardships that stand in your way. Trust in his love and power to help, for he is faithful and keeps every promise he makes.

Part Two: Trust Him

By showing compassion for the crowd, Jesus wanted to teach his disciples another vital lesson: to trust in his power and care to provide as they show compassion for those God puts before them.

From another Gospel account, we learn that when Jesus first saw the crowd, he asked one of his disciples (probably in earshot of all the others), *“Where can we buy bread for these people to eat?”* But Jesus was saying this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do.ⁱⁱ

Do you understand why Jesus asked his disciples to buy food for all these people even when he knew they couldn't? He wanted them to remember who he is: the divine Son of God, who rules over heaven and earth. Where would the disciples get food to feed over 5000 people? They couldn't get it from anywhere except Jesus himself. Would they remember what Jesus did at the wedding of Cana or all the other times he revealed his miraculous, divine power?

Jesus probably wanted his disciples to answer: “LORD, we can't provide for all these people, but we trust that you can. Tell us what you want us to do, and we will do it – trusting in your power to provide.” Sadly, this isn't what they said. Instead, they spent their time worrying and fretting – so much so that: ¹⁵*When evening came, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place and the hour is already late. Send the crowds away, so that they can go into the villages and buy food for themselves.”* ¹⁶*But Jesus said to them, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”*

Isn't Jesus' response interesting? Even though there was no conceivable way Jesus' disciples could do what he asked, he nevertheless commanded them: “You give them something to eat.” It's as if he were saying: “Don't you feel the same compassion for the crowd that I feel? Don't you care that they are hungry, sick and in need of the forgiveness and salvation that only I can offer? Love them, therefore, as I love them.”

But Jesus is asking the impossible! How can they even begin to feed such a crowd? Left to their own resources, they couldn't. ¹⁷*They told him, “We have here only five loaves and two fish.”* ¹⁸*“Bring them here to me,” he replied.*

I want to pause here and reflect on how this situation applies to us as a Church. We, too, are Jesus' disciples – tasked with sharing his love in the world. But how do we even begin to tackle such a great task? We have limited money and resources, and so many hurting people are in our world. The love Jesus asks us to show is beyond what any of us can do, yet he commands us to show everyone the same compassion he showed us. How can we do it? Jesus shows us the way. First,

he asks us to bring him what we have – regardless of how little it is. Why? Because he will bless and use it to fulfill his purpose, as we see in our text.

¹⁹Then he instructed the people to sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves and the two fish. After looking up to heaven, he blessed them. He broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples. The disciples gave the food to the people. ²⁰They all ate and were filled. They picked up twelve basketfuls of what was left over from the broken pieces. ²¹Those who ate were about five thousand men, not even counting women and children.

The reason the LORD asked his disciples to do the impossible was to reveal his power so they would put their trust in him. That is why – taking the little they could offer – he blessed it to such a degree that it fed a multitude.

What lesson can we Christians learn from this? Don't let limited resources cause you to worry and fret over how you can show the love God commands you to show. Trust in Christ. Does God often ask you to do more than you can? Absolutely. But he does this to keep you from relying on yourself – forcing you to rely on him alone to accomplish his work through you.

And as we, by faith, offer the LORD the little we have, we can be sure that he will use it to accomplish the remarkable things he wants to achieve. As the five pieces of bread and two fish show, no offering is too small for him to use for his glory. Please understand that I am not saying this to give you an “out” so you can reduce your church offerings when you have the means to give more because “God doesn't need them.” The LORD hates such selfishness and wants us to repent of it – especially considering that everything we have is a gift from his hand. No, the reason I say “no offering is too small for God to use for his glory” is to encourage those who are tempted to feel like their offerings are meaningless to God because they think they aren't large enough to have any real impact. No offering offered in faith is ever useless. God will always bless and use the little we offer him to accomplish his good and gracious will.

Brothers and sisters in Christ. Are you hurting emotionally, physically, or spiritually? Make every effort to seek the LORD, calling upon him in prayer and meeting him where he allows himself to be found. Trust in his compassion to forgive, help and instruct you. Then, having been on the receiving end of his amazing love, show compassion to others – trusting in his power and love to use the little we can offer to help the multitudes in need. Amen.

ⁱ Matthew 18:20 EHV

ⁱⁱ John 6:5-6 EHV