**Matthew 14:13-21 (ESV)**

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. [14] When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. [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 give them something to eat." [17] They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish." [18] And he said, "Bring them here to me." [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. 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. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. [21] And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

**“Making It Stretch”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, amen. It is always amazing how grocery stores abound with so many things. We go in and come out without ever thinking much of it. Only shopping at night gives a person a chance to go behind the scenes. Stockers with giant pallets fill aisle after aisle. They work at replenishing what appeared so perfect when most were around during the day. Strangely enough, it is only in times of panic, like during a hurricane or blizzard, do we truly find the system disrupted by people grabbing more than they need. Our modern day world looks abundant, but we are just as helpless when the grocery store and not God is the great provider.

Make no mistake about it, the feeding of the 5,000 is a miracle meant for our lives today. What stands behind the works of man is a better God bringing His blessings into a sinful world. It does not mean we always have what we want, but it does mean God will provide day after day. Where most miracles by Jesus are towards a particular kind of person, the feeding of the 5,000 personally affected everyone. No wonder we find this miracle recorded in all four gospels. God longs for sinners to trust in His good grace. Let alone, the earliest times in the church reflected the nature of Jesus abundant love. We read in Acts, “And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need” (Acts 2:45). The compassion of Jesus dares us to hope in Him during the most desolate times.

A desolate time had arrived when John the baptizer died at the hands of Herod. This is what drove Jesus away to end His public ministry in Galilee. He left not out of fear but in sadness. The hands of sinful men yet again put to shame God’s Word. Jesus received a small taste of what would fall upon Him just a year later at the cross. Nevertheless, there was no rest for the redeemer of a sinful world. All the burdens and problems of people followed Him. No one else would be in any mood to help but the text tells us, “When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.” Where John called sinners to repentance, Jesus was the reason all could repent and believe in the Gospel. As God promised long ago in sending the Messiah, “Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples” (Isaiah 44:5). Jesus was popular with the people, but we know it was popularity based on an earthly kingship, a leader to conquer Herod. However, here they all were out in a desolate place.

The compassion of God cares for a world in despair. As blessed as it is to have good government and just laws. This does not mean any government will ever be able to change the heart of sinful humanity. C.F.W. Walter writes,

“But it remains true after all, that men are naturally selfish and they will remain selfish until they become true Christians; it is therefore madness to think of creating a world in which everyone is satisfied to have no more than other” (Communism & Socialism 30).

Only Jesus has established a dominion to deal with all people by His abundant grace. No government on the face of this earth will ever satisfy the hunger of a sinful world. To meet the demand for every problem and pain in life the Father alone provided us with His Son. As the Psalmist declared, “Oh give thanks to the Lord; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples!” (Psalm 105:1). None other has compassion towards every concern that comes our way. None other directs us to the teaching of His Word. None other has unreserved love for sinners than the Savior. The desolate place of baptism uncovers the mystery of how God provides for a sinful world by sending His Son.

How easy it is to restrict this grace given in Jesus. The text stated, “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." But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." Placing such a responsibility upon His disciples led them into a panic over how to manage the situation. It is one thing to care for a single person, but a whole community? 5,000 men counting women and children added up to about 15,000 people. Some disciples took issue with the cost of it all. Others could not figure out how to make the little food they had stretch that far. They abandoned faith in Jesus to give an answer based on their works. The answer was simpler than they were making it for the Savior said, “Bring them here to me.” God goes beyond the Law to show how the Gospel exceeds man’s greatest expectations.

We naturally expect bad things to happen that is why you buy health insurance. We naturally expect death that is why you buy life insurance. We naturally expect limits that is why you buy limited liability insurance. As true as sin, death, and the Law are God has given us His Son. He has turned the tables so the truth of God’s love is more evident than any want to believe. Luther observes about the feeding of 5,000,

“Where does the fault lie that this is looked upon as something unusual and a miracle, while producing manifold return from a single kernel of grain does not seem unusual and miraculous?...Christians should recognize God’s wonders and from them learn to rely upon him. Why should we ever even want to despair?” (House Postil 347).

Yet, we do despair and panic just like the disciples. God forgive us for not recognizing His mercy poured out every day. By baptism into Jesus, we have the biggest miracle not merely to face death, but also to live life. As St. Paul said, “…it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring” (Romans 9:8). To diminish what God can do for a sinful world is to deny His grace, deny forgiveness, deny Jesus as Lord and Savior. The Gospel abounds for the purpose to change our sinful hearts. It is insurance that money cannot buy or the strength of men manage because God’s Word brings the saving gift.

Just as the forgiveness won by Jesus sacrifice is enough to cover an entire life. Fulfillment by God’s grace for body and soul leaves no room for sloppiness or carelessness. As the text states, “And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over.” Leftovers are for use later. Yet, how often are our leftovers left in the back of the fridge? Certainly, this applies to the physical things of life, but even more the spiritual blessings God provides to save sinners. If we want an example of not being wasteful with what God gives. Only look to faithful before us preserving the Word and Sacraments for our use today. As the Lutheran Confessions proclaim,

“…the doctrine of God’s eternal election gives God his glory entirely and completely, because he out of pure grace alone, without any merit of ours, saves us ‘according to the purpose” of his will. Nor will this doctrine ever give anyone occasion either to despair or to lead a reckless and godless life” (Tappert 496:15).

Plenty have learned to monopolize on the miracle of feeding 5,000 by now finding food at the grocery store. Can the same be said about the saving gift of the Gospel?

Forgiveness abounds for sinners by the saving gift Christ placed in His Church. The Word is the richest treasure God bestows on this world. Without it, a person can be full for a time, but eternally remains empty toward the better salvation provided by the Gospel. Jesus has made the Last Supper a miracle that takes His death and multiplies all its benefits for our life. It is a lasting meal having fed the spiritually hungry with forgiveness from heaven for well over 2,000 years. It also is a meal providing the physical answer needed on earth of how God serves the world built on His undeserved sacrifice. Sinners change greedy ways when salvation is beyond the grace and saints are able to sacrifice since the victory for us is forever in Jesus. The compassion of Jesus dares us to hope in Him during the most desolate times. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.