

Matthew 14:13-21 "Jesus has Astonishing Compassion and Astonishing Power" Pastor Dan Waldschmidt

I grew up in a house with 7 kids. I'm the oldest of seven children. I remember my parents would put a pizza in the middle of the dinner table and it would be gone like that! So I know how quickly food can be gone. If you've ever tried to feed a family of nine or a party of fifty or a wedding of 200 you can appreciate just how much food it would take to feed five thousand men besides women and children. Jesus had five loaves of bread and two fish and he used his miraculous power to multiply those loaves and fish into enough food to feed five thousand men besides women and children. It's astonishing. And today we will see that Jesus has astonishing compassion and astonishing power.

First, Jesus has astonishing compassion. Our Gospel for today starts out: **"When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place." (Matt 14:13)** It says, "when Jesus heard what had happened." What is that had happened? Well, Jesus' friend, John the Baptist, had been put to death. The ruler of the territory was a man named Herod Antipas and Herod had stolen his brother's wife and John had told Herod that that was against God's law and Herod put John in prison for that and left John in prison for a long time and eventually ordered that John be executed. When Jesus heard about the death of John, **"he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place." (Matt 14:13)**

Earlier, in 4:12 Matthew tells us that Jesus also withdrew when John was first put in prison. So it seems like Jesus withdraws and goes somewhere else because he senses that his life is in danger. Jesus thinks, rightly so, if Herod did that to John the Baptist, he'll do the same to me and so he withdraws out of Herod Antipas' territory because his time had not yet come. When the time does come for Jesus to go to Jerusalem and die on the cross, Jesus doesn't withdraw from danger he goes right into the heart of danger and dies for your sins and mine. But at this point in our lesson for today his time had not yet come and so he withdraws out of Herod Antipas' territory, to a solitary place. The Gospel of Mark tells us that another reason that Jesus withdrew to a solitary place was that he and his disciples had been working very hard and they were very tired and so Jesus said that they should go away to a solitary place and get some rest. Mark says: **"Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.' So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place" (Mark 6:20-22).** Now imagine that you are Jesus. You're tired. You need a vacation. You want to be alone for a little while and so you leave by boat to a solitary place. And when you get to the place where you're supposed to be alone, there are 15,000 people there and they all want your attention. How would you feel? I think most people would be a little bit annoyed. I think most people would groan and say, "I just want to be alone for a little while." That would be understandable. But look at Jesus. **"When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick." (14:14)** Jesus is tired. He wanted to be alone. But he doesn't see the crowds as a bother. He sees them as people who need help. That's **astonishing compassion.**

Jesus spends all day healing people and teaching God's word. He spent so much time healing and teaching that all of a sudden it was getting late. And so his disciples come to him and say, **"This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."** Jesus replied, **"They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."** **"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,"** they answered. **(Matthew 14:15-16)**

Five loaves of bread and two fish are meager resources to feed five thousand men besides women and children. Earlier this week I was giving a devotion on this passage over at Arbor View Assisted Living and I said to the people, "Imagine if you took five loaves of bread and broke a piece off and gave a piece to each of the 5,000 plus people. How big of a piece would each person get?" And one of the ladies there said, "About three crumbs!" That's right and that's what the disciples were thinking. Each person will get three crumbs.

But Jesus says, **"Bring them here to me' ... And he directed the people to sit down on the grass."** Jesus has them sit down because they were about to eat. It's time for dinner. **"Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks to God and broke the loaves."** **(Matt 14:19)** Jesus gives thanks to God. And it's good for us also to say a prayer of thanks to God before we eat. I was listening to a pastor just recently and he pointed out, "When is it most obvious that we are completely dependent on God? It's most obvious that we are completely dependent on God when we eat. We need to eat. Otherwise we would starve. We sometimes trick ourselves into thinking that we are self-

sufficient but we are not. We depend on food. Yeah, we work hard for it but if food were not available to us, it wouldn't matter how hard we work. When we eat it's most obvious that we are completely dependent on God to provide us with food. And so it's good at mealtime to stop and say thank you to God. Every time you eat, stop and think, God is feeding me because he's my good and merciful Father in heaven.

"He gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied." (14:20-21) Each person got a lot more than three crumbs. They all ate until they were full. Jesus miraculously multiplied the fives and two fish into enough food to feed five thousand men besides women and children. Five thousand men besides women and children all ate until they were full. And then after everyone had eaten until they were full, it says, **"the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over." (Matthew 14:20)** They had more left over than they had when they started! When they started they had loaves and two fish. That would have fit into one basket. But Jesus miraculously multiplied the loaves and fish so much that everybody ate until they were full and then they still twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. That's astonishing power.

And remember that Jesus says at the end of the Gospel of Matthew Jesus says, **"Surely I am with you always even until the end of the age." (Matt 28:20)** The same one who multiplied the loaves and fish is with you. He has astonishing compassion. He has astonishing power and he's with you. And is he provided for the five thousand then he'll also provide for you. Maybe not in the same way. But he'll provide for you. I was talking with one of the home bound members this week. And she was telling me that a child during the great depression and she said, "We never wanted for anything. God always gave us food to eat. God always took care of us." It might not be an extravagant life style. It might be a simple and humble life style, but he'll always take care of you.

One of the themes of Jesus' preaching is that God is going to provide for you. Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer: **"Give us this day our daily bread."** And in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink. Or about your body, what you will wear. Look at the birds. They do not sow or reap or store away in barns and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. You are much more important to God than birds. And so if he takes care of the birds then he's definitely going to take care of you." I was reading a book just this week about daily life in New Testament times. And the author was explaining that the average person in Jesus' day was very very poor. And so it's astonishing that Jesus tells these people, don't worry. Why don't they have to worry? They seem to have every reason to worry. They don't have to worry, because the one with astonishing compassion and astonishing power had promised to take care of them. And so a theme of Jesus' preaching is that God is going to take care of your physical needs.

But another theme of Jesus' preaching is that as much as you have physical needs, you have even greater spiritual needs. And so Jesus says, **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.** And he says **"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."** Jesus understood that you have spiritual needs that are even greater than your physical needs. And so there was another time when Jesus took bread and gave thanks and broke it and gave it to his disciples and this time he said, "Take and eat. This is my body which is given for you for the forgiveness of all of your sins." Without the forgiveness of sins we would starve. We would wither away apart from God's presence forever. But because Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, we will get to eat in God's presence in the banquet in heaven.

The time when Jesus showed the most astonishing compassion and astonishing power was not when he fed the five thousand. The time when he showed the most astonishing compassion and astonishing power was when he gave his flesh for the life of the world (John 6:51). And if he took care of that our greatest need, he will certainly take care of all our other needs as well. Amen.