

SERMON FOR SUN. AUGUST 2 AND WED. AUGUST 5, 2020

Pent 9A Matt 14:23-21 “Come and Get It”

Dear fellow redeemed, usually when we hear today’s familiar Holy Gospel, we focus on the miracle of Jesus feeding so many people with so little food. And, of course, that is important!

But before we get to that point, there is a great deal to be found in these verses that can help us appreciate this miracle even more deeply than I think we usually do.

And so today we’ll go through this account verse by verse, drawing you into it, so that your hungry souls will be amply fed.

“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.”

What news had Jesus heard that prompted Him to withdraw by boat to a desolate place by Himself? He’d heard that His cousin, John the Baptist, had been beheaded by Herod.

This grieved Jesus and so He went off by Himself to be alone. Perhaps He wanted to pray, as He often did. Maybe He went off to escape the threat to His own life – not because He was scared, but because His hour had not yet come. All we know is that He wanted to be alone for a time.

But the demands of His earthly ministry were such that He was not alone for very long. When the crowds of people heard **“it,”** they went looking for Jesus! What was it that the crowds had heard?

It is possible that they went looking for Jesus simply because they had heard that He left.

But more likely Matthew was inspired by the Holy Spirit to draw a contrast: When Jesus heard about John, He left to be alone; but when the *crowds* heard the horrific news about John, their former favorite preacher, they went to find Jesus. They wanted to be with Jesus, the only person they knew to go to.

And isn’t that how it often is with us sinners? When things are going well, when life is good, God goes on the back burner. Oh, He’s there, He’s in my life, but other, worldly things tend to take priority.

Frequently, it takes a tragedy, for us to realize that our need for God, to see that, **“our help is in the Name of the Lord.”**

It takes a loss of self-security for us to realize where true security lies and chase after God as if our life depended on it, which of course, it does. As so the crowds in our lesson, when they heard about John, went to find comfort and encouragement in the only they knew they could go.

Matthew tells us, **“When he [Jesus] went ashore he saw [the] great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.”**

Usually, when we want to be alone, we want to be alone! And intrusions are not welcome.

You get lost in your thoughts and aren't observing others and their needs. You can almost picture the scene: Jesus with a heavy heart, mourning the loss of His cousin, goes off.

He's probably praying and pondering his own future, so you can see how He wouldn't notice the crowds following Him by foot along the shore until He got there!

When He does go ashore, He sees them. Men, women, and children. Young and old. Married and single. Rich and poor. People from all walks of life. And as much as He may want to be alone, He cannot help Himself!

It is for these that He is come to earth, not for Himself. And He is filled with compassion. His heart goes out to them and He begins to heal them. These are His sheep, who have come running after their shepherd. **PAUSE**

"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.""

It was twilight – that time when it is still light out, but the sun is going down. And so, the disciples come to Him and say, according to our translation, **it's already getting late**. Yet the original Greek is more forceful. In it, the disciples' report reads, **"the hour has already passed."**

The hour, now that's a loaded theological phrase! While the disciples undoubtedly meant well here, indicating that the hour for eating had passed, in reality the hour had not passed for Jesus, but had actually now come!

For **now** was the hour of salvation. Now was the hour of Jesus' power and authority. And we are reminded of the words of Jesus, **"I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work."**

And so, it was both literally and figurately not yet night, and so Jesus was going to do what He came to do – feed His sheep.

While the disciples tell Jesus to **"send the crowds away"** so that they can **"go into the villages and buy food for themselves,"** Jesus has something else in mind. Before, only *some* of the people were needy, and He healed them.

But now they are all needy. And here we can see ourselves, for we are needy. We are destitute of body, and needy of soul. We are in the desolation of this world of sin and need all that our Savior has to give. In fact, if He didn't give it, we wouldn't have it.

As Luther said on his deathbed, **"We are beggars, this is true."** We are impoverished souls, burdened with sin, struggling and in need of healing, hungry for the only food that satisfies and thirsting for living water. And Jesus does not disappoint.

He does not send us away to fend for ourselves. He knows our needs and has come to provide. His hour has come. **PAUSE**

And so, **"Jesus [says to His disciples], "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."**

We should not be surprised that only five loaves of bread and two fish were more than enough to feed so many people. God had fed His people in the desolate wilderness before, and not just for one day, but for 40 years. Israel was given more than they needed.

And now the prophet greater than Moses is here. John the Baptist, the last Old Testament prophet, is now gone. Now is the “hour” for Jesus to surpass both John and Moses in the crowds eyes.

And please note— it’s not the crowds that are worried about food, it is the disciples. And so, Jesus challenges them! The people need food? Fine – **“You give them something to eat.”**

How shocking those words must have sounded to the disciples! Because they are not yet ready to assume this responsibility. They have so little!

But they will soon be the feeders. They will be the ones sent out by Jesus to feed the world with His Word and Sacraments.

And while those means, the Word and Sacraments of God, may seem small, they will miraculously feed the world and never run out. Indeed, they are here for us now, feeding us through Jesus’ appointed representatives, His pastors. **PAUSE**

But the disciples are not yet ready. So Matthew tells us, **Jesus 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.”

Now, if today was to be an essential part of the disciples’ training, did they understand the lesson that Jesus was here teaching them? It seems so . . . for the word that Matthew uses here for the crowds to **“sit down”** really isn’t the word for “sit” at all. It is the word “to recline.”

It is the word used for how people in Jesus’ day would “recline” at table to eat a banquet. It was the word used for the apostles’ posture as they reclined around the table of the Lord in the Upper Room on the night when Jesus was betrayed.

And don’t we hear echoes of that night here already in this desolate place? Jesus took the bread . . . looked up to Heaven . . . blessed . . . broke . . . and gave it to the twelve.

What Jesus did that day in the desert was not the Lord’s Supper, but the disciples had heard and learned their lesson!

Not right away, but they realized after Jesus ascended and they received the Holy Spirit. They realized that what they saw here in the desert is what they would now be doing.

Feeding God’s people with the living Bread from Heaven. Feeding God’s people with the Bread of Life.

“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. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.”

They were satisfied. In a miraculous reversal, the desolate place they'd found themselves in has become a place of plenty, while the places they had come from, the cities and towns were still places of want and need. . . .

Today more than ever, we see this to be true. People are living in huge cities, but feel more isolated than ever.

People with great wealth, but being more unhappy with their lives than ever.

People can communicate with others via cellphone, e-mail and social media, but feel as if no one is listening; that no one really knows or understands them. Look at the unbelieving crowds today. Not much has changed, has it?

And look not only to the neediness of others, but also you.

Why do we not hunger and thirst for God's Word as we know we should?

Why do we not look around and have the compassion for others that Jesus did?

Why do we look for fulfillment, peace, and a sense of community where it cannot be found?

Why with the abundance of riches that we have in the Church do we seem more impoverished than ever?

We, too, are needy. We are the beggars. We are the ones burdened with sin from which we cannot set ourselves free.

But it is not yet the night! It is the hour of compassion, and Jesus is here – with all that He is and has, to give us all that we need.

To give to us His Absolution, to unburden us from our load of sin.

To give to us His living water, so that we never thirst again.

To give to us His food, His body, and blood, so that we will be satisfied.

For that is what Jesus came to do, and why He hung on the tree of the cross. To turn that tree of curse and shame into a life-giving tree, a tree of life, growing in the wilderness, for the life of the world.

And because He has risen from the dead, He is here for us just as He was there in the desert. Having compassion, feeding, and giving. And that is the food of which Isaiah wrote, food which costs us nothing, for the price has already been paid – in the blood of the Lamb on the cross.

And so, I say to you, come and get it!

Come to the Table of your Lord, and receive His life-giving bread. Come and be satisfied, and depart – not searching, not chasing after that which cannot satisfy – but depart in peace.

In the peace of sins forgiven. In the peace of communion with God. In the peace which surpasses all understanding, but keeps you strong through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Come and eat, and find rest for your souls. **AMEN**