

Matthew 14:13-21
Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 13)
August 2, 2026

Power and compassion. Combine that ability to do something with the love of doing it and you have something pretty special. It is Christlike. In fact, when you dive more deeply into the miraculous signs that Jesus performed during his ministry, what you will see every time is his power and his compassion. Of course, that is not all that you will see and every miracle gives us a glimpse of our Savior that is new and unique but what always seems to rise to the top is his ability to do something combined with his love to do it for the sake his people.

We have before us the account of Jesus feeding the five thousand. Interestingly, of all the miraculous signs Jesus performed throughout his ministry, this is the only one recorded by all four gospel writers. Maybe that tells us something. At any rate, what we notice is power and compassion. We see Jesus with the ability to do what only God can do—because he is God—and we see a love so great, compassion so all-encompassing that he wants to do it.

You most likely have heard the story before, it's one of those you learn about when you first start Sunday school. Jesus went sailed across the sea of Galilee to spend some time in quiet solitude. Our text tells us that Jesus heard what had happened, namely that Herod the great who had put John the Baptist to death was of the false understanding that Jesus was John back from the dead. Jesus needed to remove himself from Herod's area of control, to put some distance between him and this erratic king who might have done who knows what to Jesus. He needed to take time for himself, to recuperate, to find spiritual rest in order to be strengthened for the work that remained. He needed that time.

The people, however, were not going to give it to him. They saw him cross the lake and they figured out where he was going and evidently thought to themselves, "Hey, we can walk over there." So, they did. They needed to see Jesus. They needed to listen to him. They needed him to heal their sick and suffering. And so while Jesus needed that time to himself, he displayed his care and concern for others over his own needs. As Matthew tells us, **When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.**

As we continue to read, we see greater and continued displays of his compassion. Jesus spent the day with the people. It started to get late. We read, **As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "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."** And this seems like a pretty smart and sensible thing to do. I believe the disciples were well-intentioned here, seeing a potential problem if the people remain here too long. Eventually they're going to have to make the

trek back home and if they do so having gone all day without eating, they'll collapse on their way back. Not good.

The solution the disciples proposed seems like a good one and one motivated by care and concern. But it wasn't the best thing for the people. The best thing for them was to be with Jesus, to be in his presence and listen to his teaching, to have their spiritual needs met as well as their physical needs. Which is why Jesus responds to their suggestion in what appears to be a very matter-of-fact way, **They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.** In other words, let's take care of this here. We don't have to put spiritual needs on hold to satisfy physical needs. We can do both at the same time.

That's Jesus' compassion. And here is where we see it merge with Jesus' power. Because all the food they had was five loaves of bread and two fish. Probably enough food for 3 or 4 people to eat and be satisfied. The men gathered there numbered five thousand and if they had wives and children with them, which they did, we're probably talking about a number in the area of fifteen thousand. When Jesus said, about the loaves and fish, **Bring them here to me**, he might as well have been saying, "That's enough. That'll do." And with such a small amount of food for such a large number of people, I have to imagine the disciples were confused. They probably had questions. They probably had their doubts that this actually was enough, that this was going to solve the problem of people being hungry to the point of becoming faint. But Jesus' power is always enough. And next we learn, **Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, [Jesus] gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people.** We're not told how the bread and fish multiplied. Did Jesus look up to heaven, give thanks, and look back down to see that there was sixty thousand times more food before him? Did the disciples break pieces off the loaves and find that the loaves never got smaller? We don't know. And it doesn't matter. What we do know is, **They all ate and were satisfied.** Because Jesus is powerful to meet the needs of those he loves.

Power and compassion. Jesus displays both with every miracle performed. Jesus displayed both when he took that small amount of food and fed upwards of 15,000 people. Brothers and sisters, this is what we learn about our Savior and we do well to consider these things. Because the one who was powerful and compassionate in the world some two thousand years ago has not changed and he displays the same power and compassion for us.

Think about that. Think of what Jesus does for you and me. Jesus met with the people who had walked around the lake to meet him at the spot where his boat landed. He had compassion on them and was willing to be with them. Even more remarkable is the fact that Jesus doesn't wait for us to make a long journey to prove our worth; he doesn't start moving away to see if we will put forth the effort to follow him. He doesn't wait to see how much we'll do for him before he decides whether

or not to do something for us. He reaches out through his Word and touches our hearts with the gospel even when we wanted nothing to do with him, even when we were content to sit in the filth of our sins and by our wickedness make ourselves more and more detestable in his sight.

Jesus has compassion for us. He comes to us in love even when we sin. Even when he takes a back seat in our lives. Even when we push him out of our minds when we want to do something we know is wrong, against his will. Even when we use our words more for gossip and lies than for confessing Christ. Even when we see wealth and money as the end goal rather than as a means to love and serve the people God has put in our lives. Even when our minds are filled with thoughts we would dare never put words to. When we are infected with the disease of sin that kills us and destroys us and makes us nothing, Jesus comes into our lives with love and forgiveness and compassion and he heals us.

You might have noticed also that Jesus feeding the crowd that had gathered that day did not depend on how the disciples responded to Jesus' command to give them something to eat. They didn't see how it could be done. Their minds were clouded with doubt, too certain that the laws of this world dictate that a small amount of food for a large crowd just doesn't work. But Jesus did not become angry or frustrated. He didn't berate them saying, "That was a test and you've failed!" In compassion he teaches them that God provides in ways we cannot understand, in ways too big for our tiny minds to comprehend, in ways we simply cannot imagine until he does it. He taught his disciples that day. And he teaches us. And even when we worry or doubt his promises to provide, he still keeps those promises.

Yes, he comes to us in compassion. Love so great he saw our need for forgiveness and did the unthinkable. In love he went to a cross. He went to an instrument of unspeakable pain and torture. He went there with the burden of our sins across his shoulders even though he was innocent. He went there like a common criminal even though he is the son of God. He went there in weakness and shame and he underwent something so disgusting and foul we can't even bear to look at it. He went there to take on God's wrath, the punishment that must come crashing down upon the sinner, for the wicked thoughts and hateful words and selfishness and greed and lovelessness we have committed. In compassion for us who never even asked for it and certainly never deserved it, in compassion that required him to give everything, he went to that cross and died so that we might live.

But there's power there, too. With power that we cannot understand, that act of love and compassion covered over all our sins. His death made us holy. His sacrifice caused us to be righteous in the sight of God. What is more powerful than that? In power he redeemed us and saved us. With power that only God has, he did what should have been impossible and he rescued us from death, from the consequences of our sins. The power and compassion he displayed when he fed the multitudes with next to nothing is the same power and compassion we see at the top of Calvary.

And it is complete. Don't forget that part, dear friends. When Jesus fed the five thousand, there were leftovers. More than what they started with, in fact. The only way there could be leftovers is if the people were so full they simply couldn't eat any more, even if there was more food to eat. Jesus didn't just give them enough to tide them over for the long journey home, he provided more than they needed, more than they could handle. In power and compassion, Jesus does the same today. His redemption worked on the cross is complete. Jesus didn't just give us enough to get started or enough to take the first steps toward him. He didn't just die for the sinfulness we were born with and then leave the rest up to us. He did it all. He won so much forgiveness that it overflows. His grace keeps coming even when fall into sin again and again. His grace doesn't run out.

Nor does his grace run out as he cares for us in this world, as he provides our physical needs. We trust in him to provide, not just to tide us over or to get us started and leave us to do the rest. He gives and he gives and there are enough leftovers to sustain us for as long as we live in this world. Every day we look to him and every day he gives us what we need. And we are assured of this when we read about him providing bread and fish for the multitudes. What if Jesus had stood before the crowd with compassion but no power? He would have said, "I really love you all and I want to give you food but there's nothing I can do. What if he had stood before them with power but no compassion? He would have said, "I can help you. But I'm not going to. I don't care." We need our Savior to be both. And he is. He cares for us in our lives because he can and he loves to. And we're going to heaven. We're going to heaven because Jesus is so compassion that he wants that for us. And we're going to heaven because Jesus has the power, the divine power, to make that happen. Amen.