

Guest Preacher Preston Heuer
St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church, Watertown, WI
Saturday, July 6, 2008
Text: Matthew 14:13-21
Theme: Jesus Provides for All Our Needs
A. Body
B. Soul

Grace, mercy, and peace, to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

The text for this morning is Matthew 14:13-21.

¹³ When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

¹⁵ 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.”

¹⁶ Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

¹⁷ “We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered.

¹⁸ “Bring them here to me,” he said. ¹⁹ And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰ They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹ The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Do you know what it is like to be hungry? Has there ever been a time in which your stomach has hurt because of the lack of food? We do feel hunger many times daily in our lives, but is this true hunger? Maybe you are hungry right now since you may not have eaten breakfast. It is very easy for many of us to say, “oh maybe I can just skip breakfast and sleep that extra 10-15 minutes.” But by lunchtime your stomach may start to rumble and you feel those hunger pangs. That was the case in our lesson. The people were hungry for food for their bodies. We know Jesus provides for all our needs. We see how he not only provides for our bodily needs, but also for the needs of our souls.

In our text, Jesus had just found out about his friend and relatives John the Baptist. If you look back in the previous verses of Matthew, you read that because of a foolish oath by King Herod, John was beheaded. John’s disciples came to Jesus to bring that very sad news. As part of his mourning, he goes off to a deserted, desolate place. However he doesn’t go alone, he takes his disciples with him. He wants to give his disciples some rest, but more importantly his ministry was coming to an end soon. So he wanted to teach them, preparing them for what they will face by following him.

We see many times throughout Jesus’ ministry that the crowds follow him wherever he went. After arriving on the opposite shore of the Sea of Galilee, the crowds were already there waiting for him. Jesus had compassion on them and taught them, but it was getting late and the people did not have any food. They had been there all day and had not brought any extra food. The disciples came to Jesus with a perfectly natural response to the issue at hand. **“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.”** (vs. 15) They knew they did not have enough food for all the people that were present. All they had were 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. How could they feed the entire crowd with a meal for one or two people? Did they speak out of compassion for the people or did they want to pass off the responsibility of feeding them? We are not told their reasoning for the question, but

that is not what is important. Jesus had his own plan. He said the people did not have to go to the villages to find food. He charges the disciples with a task. He says, **“You give them something to eat.”**

The disciples did not trust Jesus’ ability to provide for them as well as the people. The apostle John tells us in his account, **“He asked this only to test them, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.”** (6:6) Jesus had a plan. He took the bread and broke it up. He gave it to the disciples and they distributed it. I wonder what it was like for the disciples too see how Jesus took this little amount of food and through his almighty power was able to provide enough food for everyone with leftovers.

Our great provider, Jesus, saw the needs of the people. He knew they were in need of nourishment. After all, being able to buy food in the towns would be difficult because of the lateness in the day, especially for all 5,000 men plus women and children. Jesus knew that these people were going to go home hungry if he did not feed them. Instead of leaving them on their own, he provided for them. Not just enough to get by, but as much as they wanted. He took care of his people who came out to see him.

Just like those people in Galilee, Jesus also provides for us. He gives us everything that we need for our bodies. He provides us with the three major necessities of life: food, clothing, and shelter. Martin Luther wrote in his explanation to the 1st Article of the Apostles Creed. **“And I believe that God still preserves me by richly and daily providing clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, cattle, and all I own, and all that I need for body and life.”** Jesus gives us our daily bread. We all have clothing. We all have somewhere to go at night and lay our heads. Jesus furnishes us with everything that we need to live here on this earth.

The world hears all of this and says, **“How can that be possible? There are people who do not have food. They do not have shelter. They barely have enough clothing to stay warm in the winter time. God can not be a loving provider for them. They have nothing!”** From a worldly standpoint, they do not have anything. There are many people in the world living harder lives than the rest of us because of what they do not have. There are people in Africa and Asia who are starving. There are people in Mexico that live in poverty begging for money. There are people in the United States who are living on the streets of Milwaukee and Chicago. Some live paycheck to paycheck barely able to feed their families. Others have lost everything that they have worked so hard for. What about them? How does God provide for them?

Poverty and hardships are caused by this sinful world. When man fell into sin, everything is corrupted by it. God never tells us in his word that we will have everything and live carefree lives here on this world without difficulty. Problems and hardships will come, but God still provides for these people in his own way. So no matter what the horrible consequences of sin, God still provides for us because he loves his people even though it is hard to see at times.

What do we say when we do when we are going through those hard times. Maybe you have difficulty paying that mortgage, bills, or education costs? Maybe if you have children, you have difficulty providing for them? The natural thing for our sinful natures to do is to worry about it. We all worry about how we going to make the ends meet. When we worry, we are sinning. We fail to put our trust in Jesus just like the disciples did. We fail to trust that God will provide no matter what happens.

We hear the comfort that we need to hear and be reminded every day from our great provider Jesus. He tells us in his Word not to worry. He says, **“Don’t worry. I’ve got it taken care of.”** He tells through the writer Luke, **“Therefore I tell you do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about you’re your body.”(Luke 12:22)** **“Consider the ravens, they do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds.” (Luke 12:24)** If God can take care of the birds and the other animals of his creation, surely he takes care of us as well. Things don’t always look great here on this earth. We will always have difficulty, but we have God’s promise that he will provide for us.

As Jesus provided for those people in their time of need, he also feeds us. But not only did he feed with great abundance for their bodily needs, he also provided them with something else. He gave them what was more important first. He fed their souls with the food of his precious Word.

“When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.” (Vs. 13-14) Jesus had compassion on those people that followed him desperately wanting to see him. In Mark’s account, he tells us that they were like sheep without a shepherd. (Mark 6:34) He saw that they were lost spiritually and saw their need. He recognized not just the need for bodily food or bodily healing, but also the need for something more important, something permanent. He fed their souls.

As sinful human beings, we are born with a great spiritual hunger because of sin. We suffer from great hunger pangs that cannot be taken away by ourselves. Just as babies are helpless to feed themselves, so as we are also unable to feed ourselves. We are dead in the starvation of sin. This is not the kind of hunger that we can just go to refrigerator and pick out something to eat. We go to the refrigerator, but it is empty. There is not even one crumb of bread there for us to satisfy the emptiness that we have. We try to fill up the fridge with our good deeds trying to please God, but that does not work. When we try to fill it up, stuff just falls right out. Even the little things we try to put on the door fall out on our own feet. It’s like having a refrigerator with slanted shelves. Nothing stays. It falls out and spills all over us the stains of our own imperfection.

The prophet Isaiah speaks about our attempts to fill up our fridges. He says, **“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.”** (Isaiah 64:6) We shrivel up and our bodies waste away because of our sins. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves from this spiritual hunger.

But we are not forgotten and left for dead in our starving condition. Jesus shows us compassion as he did the people that came to hear him. He has come to feed us the food, the message of his saving love for us. The food which he gives us is the Gospel message. Jesus came into the world as a helpless baby. He lived under the same Law that we live under, but he did much differently than us. He lived his life perfectly fulfilling the Law, died on the cross, and rose again for us. He straightened out the shelves and filled up our fridge for us. Not just full, but overflowing.

Jesus did this all so that we can receive this wonderful food. By hearing God’s Word, we take in the spiritual food that satisfies the hunger that we had every day. By coming to his Holy Supper and receiving the body and blood of Christ, we are filled up and renewed. The words “Given into death for our sins” fill up our souls with the spiritual bread and fish. Whenever we come to listen to his Word, we are receiving the same thing that those people in the desolate place received.

Jesus dealt with the people’s hunger in the order of importance. He cared for their soul with the spiritual food that provides much more than temporary hunger relief, but the food that prepares us for eternal life. Then he blessed them with bodily sustenance, which took care of their earthly needs.

Jesus does the same for us. He provides us with the message of salvation that builds up our faith looking toward the hope of eternal life. He also blesses us with all that we need here on this temporary world until we go home to heaven.

When we eat that breakfast in the morning we will hunger again in a few hours. So are you hungry now? God will provide for our bodies and our souls. We have that promise. But we also have the promise from God that when this earth passes away and we see our Savior face to face, we can say with the Apostle John, “Never again will they hunger, never again will they thirst.” (Revelation 7:16) Amen.

Now the peace of God which transcends all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus Amen.