

Dear fellow children of God;

While the story of the feeding of the 5000 is one of Jesus' more famous miracles, it probably doesn't have the wow factor of some of his other miracles, like calming the storm or walking on water or the raising of Lazarus. Add to this the fact that many of us first heard this miracle as a young child, and we know so many of the details: 5000 men, 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish, 12 baskets of leftovers. We know how it begins, we know how it ends. Yet when we realize that other than Jesus' resurrection, it is the only miracle found in all four gospels, then we can appreciate the fact that if the details of this miracle have not changed, then neither have the beautiful truths that go with it. Our theme today is:

### **Look to Jesus in all of your needs**

- 1. Jesus knows your needs**
- 2. Jesus fulfills your needs**

Our text occurs about a year before Jesus' death, and it marks a new period in Jesus' ministry. We're told in our text: **"Jesus withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place."** He would still meet crowds to teach and to heal, but now more and more he would withdraw to remote places with his disciples. Jesus knew that he had to prepare his disciples for his death, and so he had begun to spend time alone with them explaining his mission and his Father's will. So in the very first verse of our text, before he even feeds the 5000, Jesus knew the needs of his disciples. It was a need of which they weren't even aware, but it was their need to be in tune with God's will for Jesus' mission and his will for their lives. And so Jesus and his disciples get in a boat and sail across to the northeast corner of the Sea of Galilee.

But when they arrived, they found they weren't going to be alone. We're told **"Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns."** Chances are the disciples were less than thrilled. They no doubt had been looking forward to their time alone with Jesus, but we're told that **"when Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them."**

"Jesus had compassion." This Greek phrase means "He was filled with tenderness," or "his heart went out to them." Why did Jesus feel so for these people? They had followed him because they had heard of his many miracles. He attracted attention wherever he went. Some came out of curiosity, some came to be healed, but very few came because they recognized him as their Savior. Jesus though, as always, recognized their greatest need. Yes, he healed their sick, but we're told he did so much more than that. Mark says that Jesus looked at them and saw that they were **"like sheep without a shepherd."** And so long before they had their first hungry thoughts of supper: **"Jesus welcomed them, began teaching them many things, and spoke to them about the kingdom of God."**

You have to admire these men, women and children who were willing to walk about 6 miles to see Jesus. Perhaps they were more interested in physical healing than hearing God's Word. Perhaps they came for the wrong reason. But they came. Not many of us walked 6 miles to come see Jesus today. Would we if we had to? Would we have that same zeal? What brought you here today? The chance to worship Jesus, to hear his Word and to receive forgiveness? Or are we here because "it's just what we do"? Are we here out of mindless habit? Are we here because a spouse or parent said, "We're going to church?" Whether we are 17 or 27 or 67, we have a sinful nature that doesn't want to be here, a sinful nature that once we are here pats the Pharisee in all of us on back and says, "Now you've done your duty."

Yet this is our comfort: No matter what our motives, no matter how many times our sinful nature distracts us or says "you have so many other things that would be more enjoyable than church," Jesus still knows our needs. He knows that we need to be here, knows that we need to confess our sins, knows that we need the reassurance of his unconditional forgiveness and the comfort of his Word. For us, that's as great a miracle as Jesus feeding thousands of men, women and children. If there are 200 of us here, then Jesus knows 200 different needs. He knows what's bothering you, knows whether your week has been one of more good news or bad news, knows what secret sins are plaguing you, knows what doubts and worries are chasing you in circles in the middle of another sleepless night. Jesus knows all of those things, and he has no less compassion on you sitting in your pew than he did on those sitting on the side of hill overlooking a lake 2000 years ago.

I like to think that I'd have made that 6 mile trip to see Jesus. I like to think I'd have recognized what a blessing it was to sit at his feet. But then I can remember this: No less a blessing for me to sit here in God's house, to bring with me needs of which I'm so aware and needs of which I have no clue. What a blessing for me to be here and be

reminded that Jesus' heart also goes out to me, and if I doubt that compassion, then I need only to look at the cross for the reminder of Jesus' greatest miracle, for it is that same compassion that led him to Calvary.

**Look to Jesus in all of your needs: He knows those needs, and he fulfills those needs. "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."** The disciples were concerned that it was getting late, and that unless Jesus sent the crowd on its way, they'd never make it back to town to buy food. How quick they were to give Jesus advice: "Send them away!" "You better do this, or just think what might happen!" Of course, they never stop to think that Jesus already knew the needs of the crowd and knew the solution.

**Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."** As so often happens, Jesus' answer didn't seem to make much sense. The disciples said, **"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish."** The disciples looked at what was in front of them: a definite lack of food, rather than looking at who was in with them: the very Son of God. But now Jesus gently teaches them that the Savior who was with them was bigger than the problem in front of them. **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.** And just like that, the problem disappeared. **They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.**

That's the famous miracle. That's the miracle we know by heart. So, did the disciples get it? Did they figure it out? Jesus gave them the privilege of being active first-hand participants in this miracle. He gave **them** the food, he had **them** feed the people, he had **them** gather the 12 baskets of leftovers. And yet about 8 hours later these same disciples cowered in a boat as Jesus walked toward them in a storm and Jesus had to ask them why they doubted and had such little faith.

This is where we might be tempted to say, "How foolish!" First of all, how would they think that feeding a crowd was beyond Jesus' ability? After all, by this time these disciples have seen Jesus turn water into wine, catch thousands of fish, calm a violent storm and raise two people from the dead. Why would they think that a supper meal is more than he can handle? And once he performs this miracle, why wouldn't this have been enough to finally convince them. Jesus could get them through supper but not get them through the night? But when I shake my head at their needless worry, then I have to shake my head at the man in the mirror. Like the disciples, there have been far too many times when I've been very quick to offer Jesus my obvious solution and then questioned his answer. When Jesus told the disciples, "You give them something to eat," they looked at him in bewilderment and said, "You have got to be kidding. There's only one solution: **Send them away!** Jesus, you're not listening." There have been far too many times when I can only see the problem in front of me and not Jesus beside me and his promises behind me, too many times when I've thought, "Jesus, you're not listening."

And what happens when we, like the disciples, spend more time worry about a problem than we do trusting Jesus to provide a solution? Then Jesus does what he always does: He sits us down and says "Shhhh! Be still, stop talking, and just listen. I can calm storms, and feed the hungry, I can cure diseases, I can make problems disappear, and the burdens that don't disappear...I can help you carry them." And Jesus says, "And I'll do all of this according to my Father's perfect plan for your life, even if it takes a miracle."

***Even if it takes a miracle.*** There are those who doubt that God still does miracles today. In fact, there are many who doubt that the miracle in our text ever happened. Some believe that Jesus hypnotized the people into believing they weren't really hungry. Others believe that what Jesus did was use the 5 loaves and 2 fish provided by a young boy to shame the rest of the thousands into sharing the food they had brought along and hidden away. Both theories ignore God's clear Word, both theories doubt Jesus' power. There are even more people who deny that God performs miracles yet today. As though a baby at a font becoming a child of God through water and the Word isn't a miracle. As though it isn't a miracle to kneel at your Savior's table and receive his very body and blood and know that every sin is forgiven.

The greatest tragedy in trying to strip Jesus of his miraculous power isn't that it robs Jesus of the respect he deserves. The respect of others isn't what makes Jesus who he is. The greatest tragedy in denying Jesus' miracles is that one then logically denies the Bible's greatest miracle: the miracle of a cross and an empty tomb. It is that miracle that provides for our greatest need: the need for forgiveness and the guarantee of life in heaven.

Feeding me when I'm hungry, curing me when I'm sick, calming one storm after another in my life? All wonderful examples of Jesus' power, but nothing compared to this miracle: In spite of all of your sins, all of your doubts, all of your shortcomings, you have a home in heaven.

- Jesus knew that need
- Jesus fulfilled that need
- You are a child of God. A child of God!

What a miracle indeed.

Amen.