

Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost
August 4, 2002

Sermon by Pastor Paul Janke

Jesus Satisfies Our Needs

1. In his compassion he sees our needs
2. In his strength he supplies our needs

Matthew 14:13-21

NIV Matthew 14:13 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.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Are you satisfied? That's what the customer service department of a well-run business wants to know. Are you satisfied with the repair work done on your car? Are you satisfied with your motel stay? Are you satisfied with the meal you just ate?

But "Are you satisfied?" is not just a question others ask us; it's also a question we ask ourselves. Am I satisfied with my job? Am I satisfied with my home? Am I satisfied with my marriage? Am I satisfied with myself, my appearance, my abilities, with what I've done with my life? Quite often, the answer is, "No" or at least, "Not completely." The truth is we're usually living in a state of dissatisfaction with at least several aspects of our lives. Dissatisfaction started early in our world, when Eve began to think that there had to be more to life than the perfect environs of Paradise. Since the Fall into sin, there's been a lot to be dissatisfied about in our world. But the Fall brought with it another problem, namely, that we often look in the wrong places to find satisfaction. God's Word—and experience—show us, though, that true and lasting satisfaction can't be bought. And we wouldn't necessarily find satisfaction if we could wave a magic wand and drastically transform our surroundings. Real and lasting satisfaction is that elusive. But it's not impossible to attain. Satisfaction begins and ends in Jesus Christ, who here in Matthew 14 shows both his desire and his ability to satisfy our needs. **Jesus Satisfies Our Needs.** His ability to satisfy our needs comes from the unique combination of

unfailing compassion and unlimited strength that he possesses. 1] In his compassion he sees our needs, 2] in his strength he supplies our needs.

1. In his compassion he sees our needs

The beginning of this section needs a little explanation. It says, “*When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.*” Jesus’ urge to get away was a result of the bad news he had just received: John the Baptist was dead. John was a great prophet, the one who had been assigned the task of announcing the advent of Christ. John didn’t die in his sleep. He died in prison, beheaded at the request of Herod’s niece. Ultimately, he was beheaded because he had been faithful to the mission God had given him.

This was sorrowful news. Jesus got into one of his disciples’ fishing boats and gave orders to go to a solitary place. He wanted to be alone with his thoughts, alone with his Father in prayer, accompanied only by that band of men who were closest to him. But that was not to be. It says here, “*Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed, (he) saw a large crowd.*” You probably know that feeling. You’re planning a quiet night at home, to read, perhaps, or watch a movie. Then the phone rings. It’s not a telephone salesperson, who can be easily disposed of, or a wrong number. It’s someone who has a pressing request that will require hours of your attention and right now. Your reaction is...? Annoyance? Disappointment? Weary resignation? That’s not what we see in Jesus. Matthew says, “*When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.*”

The Bible says that Jesus is “the image of the invisible God” and we see that here. Our God is all compassion and the Son of God is unfailingly compassionate, too. The Bible says of God, “**As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.**” (Ps. 103:13-14) Jesus didn’t view this crowd as an imposition on his time or as an unwelcome intrusion on his grief. His reaction was pure compassion. He was touched by the needs of these people and so he laid aside his plans and went to work. He waded into that crowd and healed their sick.

I don’t know how long Jesus was at this—hours, very likely—but day wore on and it was time to start thinking about dinner. The disciples had no provisions and hardly anyone in that vast crowd had thought to bring dinner either. So the disciples decide to help Jesus manage his schedule. They said to him, “*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.*” By this scenario, one of the disciples might announce, “OK, everybody, the Lord is done healing for the day. Have a good trip home. If you haven’t brought dinner, you might try the bakery in the village up the road. If you leave now there might be some bread left when you get there.” What the disciples have in mind doesn’t sound very compassionate. In fairness to them, though, I’m not sure we’d be very compassionate. We might think, too, “They got out here; they can find their way back. And if they didn’t prepare properly for the journey, whose fault is that?”

But Jesus is not going to go with the disciples' suggestion. His heart goes out to these people as he thinks of them making the long, hungry walk home. He sees the long lines at the village bakeries, if there's bread to be had at all. He is aware of the shortage of provisions. He already has in mind a much more compassionate response to the need of the crowd. Now if Jesus is the kind of Savior who doesn't want people to walk home on an empty stomach, this bodes well for the way he'll react to our other needs. Our biggest problem will never be that we're hungry and a long ways from home, but that we're sinful and a long way from heaven. The Feeding of the 5000 is just one of many indicators that Jesus Christ cares deeply for his people, that he cares deeply for us. He came to this earth because he wanted to satisfy our needs, not just our physical needs, but more importantly our spiritual needs. In the words of the Lord's Prayer, his compassion moved him to come and lead us to know God as our Father, to bring us into his kingdom, where we enjoy forgiveness for our trespasses and deliverance from the Evil One. Even the scourge and the nails and the cross were not enough to cause Jesus to abandon his compassionate plan. We have to know that without the spiritual blessings that come through faith in Jesus, real satisfaction isn't possible. Bread and fish can satisfy physical hunger for a few hours, but only the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ, can satisfy our souls.

The beginning of living in satisfaction is to trust that Jesus perfectly knows our needs and has promised to respond to our needs in unfailing compassion. We're not flying solo. God has promised to keep us as the apple of his eye. So we can chose to live in the kind of perpetual dissatisfaction that embitters our lives and the lives of those around us, or we can listen and trust when Jesus says about fretting over material things, even the necessities of life, **"...the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."** God knows our needs. God is absolutely determined to provide us with all need. Therefore we can take refuge in the words of Isaiah, **"You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you."** (26:3)

The Coca-Cola Company once had an advertising jingle that included the line, "I'd like to buy the world a Coke." The song was about worldwide peace and harmony between the nations and the races. "I'd like to buy the world a Coke." That's a tall order for a 12-ounce can of sugar water with a dash of caramel coloring. Even if you could buy the world a Coke, would that really change things? There's obviously a gap between what the song imagines and what it's possible to do. But Jesus doesn't suffer from that gap. As we see in the Feeding of the 5000, what Jesus wants to do, he can do. In his strength, he supplies what we need.

2. In his strength he supplies what we need

Instead of going with the disciples' suggestion that he dismiss the crowd to go and buy food, Jesus said to his disciples, *"They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."* That immediately started the disciples sputtering about the impossibility of such an idea. There was only one boy who'd thought to bring food along, and he had just five loaves of bread and two fish. If you thought those were tiny portions when the nine trapped miners in Pennsylvania split a sandwich nine ways, five loaves and two fish

divided more than 5000 ways was going to be so minuscule you couldn't see the portions. Buying food for this whole crowd would have cost 8 months' pay, which the disciples' treasury didn't have. To their ears, then, "You give them something to eat" was out of the question.

The disciples were still learning that nothing is impossible with God. Jesus said, "*Bring them here to me.*" He had the people sit down on the grass, then he took the loaves and fish, looked up to heaven, and gave thanks. Then Jesus gave the bread and fish to his disciples and kept giving bread and fish until the whole crowd had been served. As it turned out, the disciples did just what Jesus had told them to do in the beginning: They gave the people something to eat. They didn't do it with food they had on hand. Nor did they do it with food they bought. Rather, the strength of Jesus opened up a brand new possibility for meeting the needs of that crowd. And this is the same God about whom the apostle Paul said, "**My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.**" (Php. 4:19) What looks impossible to us, proves to be eminently do-able by the power of Jesus.

In our Prayer of the Day earlier, we prayed, "O God, you reveal your power chiefly in showing mercy and kindness." That's a great insight. God's power, seen by itself, ought to cause us to shudder with terror. This is a God, after all, whom we've offended time and again with our unbelief and sin. Yet when we survey God's actions, we see so often how he uses his power to show us mercy and kindness. His power, on display in the creation of the world, he used to give us this earth as our home. And even in its fallen state, it is a place of beauty and wonders and obvious goodness. God's power was veiled at the incarnation of Jesus—his sharing our humanity—but that act by itself could not have happened but for God's strength. That the Son of God died and then took his life again is also a stirring display of God's power used in the interest of our spiritual welfare. And it's a secret working of God's power that can transform unbelieving hearts in to hearts that are warm and beating with the pulse of faith in Jesus. God truly does reveal his power chiefly in showing mercy and kindness. Time and again he's shown that he not only knows our needs but has the strength to supply what we need.

We sometimes face our versions of Jesus telling us, "You give them something to eat." He places a challenging situation before us, one we're not sure we're up to. He calls on us to bear a cross for our confession of his name or he permits some unwelcome change to come into our lives. So often we react either by trying to conquer the challenge on our own or by despairing of ever meeting the challenge. This account of the Feeding of the 5000, though, directs us to look to Jesus for the strength to do what he's asking us to do. He knows our need and he is well able to respond. This is the God, after all, who opens his hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing. (Ps. 145:16)

Matthew doesn't mention it, but we know that this crowd didn't remain satisfied for long. After they'd eaten this miracle food, they decided that a man like Jesus would be handy to have as king. They tried to make him their king by force. Jesus got away. But the incident reminds us that true and lasting satisfaction can't be had in a loaf of bread or any amount of material possessions. It comes rather in seeing Jesus as the answer to our

greatest need, the need to be rescued from sin and hell, and then in knowing that the Savior who's done this will give us everything else we need as well. Jesus truly is a Savior who meets all our needs. Amen.