



THE COMPASS

RED HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Compass:
Encounter-Examine-Explore-Embrace God's Word
On
Your Discipleship Path

Sermon Series: "Jesus, Who?"
(Pentecost, 2026)

"Setting the Table." Text(s): *Matthew 14.13-31; Various Texts.*

☐ Day #1—Monday, August 3rd. Read: Matthew 14.13-21; Mark 6.34-44; Luke 9.10-17; John 6.1-13. —Encounter: God's Word and your life—What do you Hear and/or See?

The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is recorded in all four gospels. This alone reveals its importance. Jesus both fulfills the common expectations of His time concerning the coming of the Messiah and He meets the people's immediate needs. Whenever we doubt God's power to supply our needs, we can trust that Jesus will provide; He just asks us to come to Him and *believe*. This miracle took place at Bethsaida, likely just before the Passover (See *John 6.4*). Besides meeting an immediate, physical need of the people, Jesus was also illustrating the kind of ministry that His disciples would have after His departure. They too (and you and me), would be involved in feeding people, with both physical and spiritual food.

In *Matthew 14.13*, we are told that Jesus withdrew to a solitary place. There were likely several reasons for this withdrawing: (1) The report of John the Baptist's death, (2) The growing antagonism of Herod, (3) The disciples' need for rest after their preaching tour (see *Mark 6.31*), and (4) His need to get alone with His disciples in order to teach them. Like His disciples, Jesus knows that it is important that we get alone from time to time to hear God's voice and refresh ourselves physically and mentally. Commentator Vance Havner rightly points out that "If we don't come apart and rest—we'll come apart!"

In *Matthew 14.14*, the people anticipated where Jesus and His disciples were going. The crowds, by walking along the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, joined Jesus. The large crowd was probably due to Jesus' increasing popularity as a teacher, healer, and potential messianic conqueror (we see this particularly in John's account of this miracle). As *John 6.14-15* makes clear, the people wanted to force Jesus into political action.

Matthew, however, does not draw attention to this. For him, the story was a vivid expression of the compassion and the miraculous power of Jesus as Messiah. As I described yesterday, the Greek word translated "moved with compassion" literally means "to have one's inner being (viscera) stirred." It is stronger than sympathy. The word is used twelve times in the Gospels, and eight of these references are to Jesus Christ. Jesus was "moved with compassion" when He saw the needy multitudes (*Matthew 9.36*); they were like sheep that had been lacerated from brutal fleecing—torn, exhausted, and wandering. Twice He was "moved with compassion" when He saw the hungry multitudes without food (*Matthew 14.14; 15.32*). The two blind men (*Matthew 20.34*) and the leper (*Mark 1.41*) also stirred His compassion, as did the sorrow of the widow at Nain (*Luke 7.13*). Clearly we have a Savior who *cares deeply* for us and who is aware of our needs.

Consider/Reflect: As you read all four accounts of this miracle, what are the similarities and differences? What do you discover about God's compassion? Each Gospel writer was writing to a different audience and highlighted certain aspects of this miracle story that the writer saw as important. As you read these stories, put yourself in the story. Who do you identify with? The disciples? The crowd? The sick?

☐ Day #2—Tuesday, August 4th. Read: Again: Matthew 14.15-16. —Examine: The Text and its Message.

The disciples can be commended for their concern for the crowds that followed Jesus. Caring for others is always an appropriate task for Jesus' disciples then and now. However, there is a second step as well. We need to be willing to act, even though we often believe we have to offer. Jesus can multiply our "loaves and fishes" as He did those of the disciples so long ago. If we care and act, and reach out to help, Jesus will provide.

Again, the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 is recorded in all four Gospels and it was definitely a miracle. I say this because some claim that Jesus only encouraged the people to bring out their own hidden lunches (?) However, that ignores the clear statements of God's Word. John 6.14 definitely calls the event a "sign" or "miracle." Would the crowd have wanted to crown Jesus King and take Him by force to Jerusalem simply because He tricked them into sharing their lunches (John 6.14–15)? Not likely!

It takes little imagination to picture the concern (maybe fear?) of the disciples. Here were more than 5,000 hungry people (not counting women and children) and they had nothing to feed them! When they considered the time (evening) and the place (a desolate place), they concluded that nothing could be done to solve the problem. Their recommendation to Jesus was: "Send them away!" The disciples' need (feeding all those people) was seen through their own limited resources (we do not have enough)! Do we not do the same? I look at the circumstances in my life and assume that I lack what I need: time, money, patience, courage. I immediately go to the easy answer: I cannot do what I need to do; I am alone; I wonder/worry what will happen. Perhaps the next step is to do what the disciples' wanted to do: ignore the problem and send the people away!

By His challenge in *v* 16, Jesus deliberately drew the disciples into the action, and He used the provisions, which *they could supply*. Through their involvement (and perhaps particularly through the remarkable experience of picking up far more than they had brought in the first place!), they would remember and learn from the occasion; that learning was to be tested later (Matthew 16.5–12).

For some reason, we tend to feel and believe that it is never the right time or place for God to work; we doubt His power, concern, or even love. Jesus does not want us to doubt Him! Jesus watched His frustrated disciples as they tried to solve the problem, but "He Himself knew what He was intending to do" (John 6.6). He wanted to teach them (you and I) a lesson in *faith* and *surrender*.

Consider/Reflect: Do you ever feel like what you have to bring to God is not enough? Have you ever said to God: "God, I just can't do this because _____?" Remember, God is not concerned as much with our *abilities* as He is with our *availability*. Bring what you have to God; He will do the rest.

☐ **Day #3—Wednesday, August 5th. Read: Matthew 14.16-18; John 20.30; 2 Corinthians 8.12. —Explore: The background to this text(s).**

Jesus taught the disciples then, and He teaches us today, lessons in faith and surrender. Consider these lessons:

Start with what you have. In John's version, Andrew found a boy who had a small lunch, and he brought the boy to Jesus. Was the boy willing to give up his lunch? Yes, he was! God begins where we are and uses what we have.

Give what you have to Jesus. Jesus took the simple lunch, blessed it, and shared it. The miracle of multiplication was in Jesus' hands! A little is a lot if God is involved. Jesus broke the bread and gave the pieces to the disciples, and they, in turn, fed the multitudes.

Obey what He commands. The disciples had the people sit down as Jesus ordered. They took the broken pieces and distributed them, and discovered that there was plenty for everybody. As His servants, we are "distributors," not "manufacturers." If we give what we have to Him, He will bless it and give it back to us for use in helping others.

Conserve the results. There were twelve baskets filled with pieces of bread and fish after the people had eaten all they wanted. However, these pieces were carefully collected so that nothing was wasted (Mark 6.43; John 6.12). I wonder how many of the pieces the young boy took back home with him? Imagine his mother's amazement when the boy told her the story!

A little more about the nature of a miracle in Scripture. The Greek word for miracle is "*sēmeion*" which means "sign." Jesus' miracles were "signs," always pointing to something more than just the miracle itself. Jesus' miracles were signs that God's love, mercy, and power, in a word, His Kingdom—has broken into the world in a new and different way. Often, the problem was that the people just wanted the miracles. They were not willing to commit to the obedience—the day-in-and-day-out faithfulness without the "miraculous" that discipleship requires. God still performs miracles and He expects our obedience even when the miracles do not come or are different than we expect. Lutheran theologian Jurgen Moltmann makes the point

that Jesus' healings are not supernatural miracles in a natural world; they are the only truly natural things in a world that is unnatural, demonized, and wounded!

Consider/Reflect: Where do you need a miracle in your life? Is there an area of your life that you have not given to Jesus? Jesus cannot work with what we do not surrender to him. **[Pray]:** "Lord, I need a miracle. No longer, in my own power, can I deal with _____. I surrender it to you. Change me, change this situation. Give me the patience, the wisdom, and the courage to let you work, as I am obedient to you. Amen."

☐ **Day #4--Thursday, August 6th. Read: Again: Matthew 14.19-21. —Explore: The background to this text(s).**

It was customary that the head of the household in a Jewish family, to give thanks to God at the beginning of every meal. The usual form was: "*Blessed be thou, O Lord our God, the King of the world, who produced bread out of the earth.*" There was also a similar blessing for the wine: "*Blessed art Thou, O Lord, the King of the world, who created the fruit of the vine.*" These, or similar blessings, were used at the celebration of the Passover meal. Jesus will likewise offer these blessings over the Passover meal in the upper room the night before His death. Here is a connection to the Passover, as well as the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

To eat together was a symbol of unity. Jesus acted as host to a large family gathering, and thus welcomed the crowd into a new community. While the menu was not out of the ordinary, perhaps we should see this meal as a deliberate foretaste of the Messianic banquet (which Jesus alludes to in Matthew 8.11–12). For example, Jesus' order to "sit down" (v.19), is a relatively formal word for reclining at a banquet. It is also hardly accidental that the verbs in v.19 ("take," "give thanks," "break," "give") are those used in the New Testament accounts of the Last Supper.

Again, in this passage, there are some very significant theological motifs. When Jesus fed the people in the "wilderness" with bread, this action would have called to remembrance that the long expected Messiah would provide bread in the "wilderness" just as did Moses did in the desert (See Exodus 16; Numbers 11.). Additionally, God promised to lead the people who are "like sheep without a shepherd" (Numbers 27.17; Mark 6.34.). Jesus led the people in this story to find the food they needed as a shepherd would feed his sheep. Jewish followers of Jesus, then and later, would hardly have failed to note the parallel to two feeding miracles in the Old Testament; the provision of manna in the desert (Exodus 16) and Elisha's similar multiplication of loaves (2 Kings 4.42-44). In all these ways Jesus is again seen as the coming Messiah, who is the "new Moses" and even greater than the ancient prophets (Matthew 12.6, 41, 42)!

All of these images, from the future "messianic banquet," when all people will be fed from God's table, to the similarity of earlier prophetic actions, would raise questions in the minds of those being fed by Jesus; just who is this Jesus? How can He feed us so miraculously? Is He just another "teacher" or is He who He claims to be: the anointed one of God (Messiah) sent by God to heal/feed/save the world?

Consider/Reflect: What insight about Jesus will you remember from this story? How have you seen Jesus stretch your resources beyond what you could imagine?

☐ **Day #5— Friday, August 7th. Read: Matthew 14.18-21.—Explore: The background to this text(s).**

Again, Jesus knew all along what he would do (see v.16b). When Jesus took what the people had, He then blessed it, broke it, and gave it back to the people. Notice the similarity to Holy Communion. In the Eucharist, Jesus takes bread blesses it, breaks it, and then gives that bread (Himself) to us. It is a spiritual reality that when we are willing to let Jesus take *something* in our lives, Jesus takes what we offer and blesses it, breaks it, and then gives it back to ourselves and to others for our —and their—spiritual growth and power! This *something* that we bring to Jesus can be our resources, our time, our relationships, and especially, our very selves. When this "spiritual cycle" happens, there is always enough and lives are blessed! In v.20, we are told that the disciples used baskets to pick up the leftover food. The Greek word here is *kophinos*, which was a small basket. These baskets were probably the ordinary traveling baskets that the Jewish people took with them on a journey. They carried their provisions in them so that they might not be polluted by eating the food of the Gentiles. It is also believed that Jewish travelers carried hay in them, which they would use to sleep on at night. Thus, they were able to separate themselves from the Gentiles in food and lodging. It is interesting that these baskets used for separating one's self from others, are in this story, containing the leftovers of a miracle performed by the One who tore down the dividing walls of hostility, religion, and culture!

There are numerous other lessons from this miracle: Jesus takes a little and makes it much; Whatever He blesses, He also breaks. Are we willing to be broken? People today are in the wilderness of sin (v.15) and need Jesus; Jesus can overcome every

difficulty in human lives and feed the “multitudes” of this world who are spiritually starving! Whatever our excuses may be—not enough money, the wrong place, the wrong time—Jesus takes what we have and meets our need. We just have to “bring it.”

Consider/Reflect: “This miracle is obviously important because all four evangelists have recorded it. The account here makes no mention of the crowd’s reaction. They seem not to realize that a miracle has taken place. Nevertheless, the disciples know. Each has a basketful of leftovers to testify to what Jesus has done. They will also be privileged to feed the nations spiritually with the bread of life, a resource that will satisfy and never be exhausted. Whenever you have doubts about God’s power to supply your needs, whether physical or spiritual, recall this miracle. Jesus is able to provide. [Pray]: Heavenly Father, thank You for abundantly answering my prayer: ‘Give us this day our daily bread.’ Amen.”¹

□ **Day #6-Saturday, August 8th. Read: Hebrews 12.1-7; Hebrews 10.32-33; 2 Timothy 2.3.—Embrace: God and His guiding you through His Word.**

While there was not much time that had elapsed between the needs of the people and Jesus’ multiplying the fish and the loaves, for us, we often must wait for God to work in our lives. Waiting is one of the most difficult issues in our spiritual lives.

The reasons are many; our cultural adaptation to “instant gratification” and expectation of convenience, along with our natural human limitations pursuant to knowledge and control, are but a few examples. Endurance, a patient waiting on God when life is difficult and challenging, is a spiritual discipline commanded in scripture. To endure is to believe in faith that, despite outward circumstances, God is birthing something new and perhaps most critical: *God loves you and is working for your and others good*. Theologian Neil Anderson writes:

[H]ow do we ‘run with perseverance the race marked out for us’? First...[Jesus] is our model and inspiration.... Second, considers the example of the heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11. They are the ‘great cloud of witnesses’ cheering us on to victory...Third, we are to endure hardship as discipline...Being disciplined by God proves that we are children of God, “because the Lord disciplines those he loves”....[I]t is God’s will that you persevere.²

Consider/Reflect: As you read and meditate upon Hebrews 12:1-2, think about the “great cloud of witnesses” in your life: Jesus, Moses, Luther, Paul, your parents, your spouse, your friends—imagine them cheering you on from heaven! Does this help you to endure?

Pray and Prepare for Worship Tomorrow...

Sermon Series: “Jesus, Who?”

Scripture Texts:

Job 38.4-18

Romans 10.5-17

Matthew 14.22-33

¹ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009).

² Neil T. Anderson. *The Daily Discipler* (Ventura: Regal, 2005).