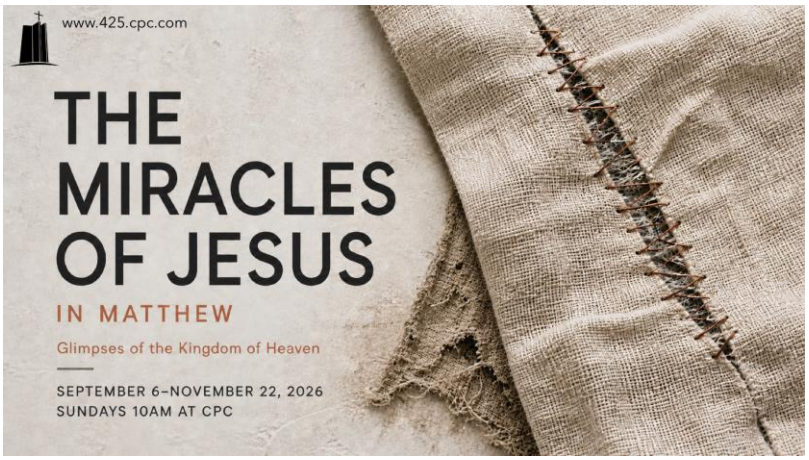


Bread in the Wilderness
Matthew 14:1-21

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**This original sermon is not A.I. generated*

We're continuing our series, "The Miracles of Jesus in Matthew," and looking today at an incredible miracle of divine provision. So far, we've gone through several miracles of healing, and a deliverance from demonic possession. These are just a few of the many different types of miracles that Jesus did when he came to earth. He also performed miracles of provision; over nature; of supernatural knowledge; over death, and of course the miracle of the incarnation.

Each miracle reveals the authority of Jesus as the Son of God, but they also reveal the nature of the kingdom of heaven. It's a nature that takes after the nature of its King; so, these miracles give us a glimpse of who Jesus is, what his kingdom is like, and what we have to look forward to in eternity. For us today, the miracles are windows into the kingdom of heaven; they give us the hope of a coming place where all the sorrows and troubles we face today will be no more. The miracles also relate to our lives now. Jesus is just as able to make a miracle of your life today as he did for so many 2,000 years ago. So, we get to experience the kingdom of heaven right now in our lives today, and we get a glimpse of what heaven will be like when we get there.

Thank God, Jesus did not leave us blind to where and what we will spend eternity living in. What good would it be if Jesus came saying, "Hey, here's my offer of eternal life," and then he never let us know exactly what this offer of eternal life consigned us to for eternity? If God is going to offer us something so incredible and enduring as eternal life, then he certainly needs to give us assurance that we're not walking into something we have no idea about, right? Well, that's exactly what Jesus did in the miracles. He came performing miracles over every aspect of our existence to show exactly what he is giving to us in eternity. Thank God eternity doesn't look like the world we live in now! The beautiful part of this is that he comes to each one of us with a down payment or a guarantee that we can have right now-- that is, the gift of his Holy Spirit living within each of us, which is a miracle in itself.

Let’s open the Scripture this morning, Matthew 14. The miracle story is actually vss. 13-21 but I’m going to go back to the beginning of chapter 14 because this first very tragic story sets itself in a very noticeable, stark contrast to the miracle.

Matthew 14:1-21

14 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, 2 and he said to his attendants, “This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him.”
3 Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, 4 for John had been saying to him: “It is not lawful for you to have her.” 5 Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered John a prophet.
6 On Herod’s birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for the guests and pleased Herod so much
7 that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. 8 Prompted by her mother, she said,

"Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." 9 The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted 10 and had John beheaded in the prison. 11 His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother.
12 John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.
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.

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Mt 14:1–21.

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Two Contrasting Feasts (Matt. 14:1-12)

Before we get to the miracle story, let's zoom out and contrast these two stories. These are two royal meals set side by side. The first meal is King Herod's grand birthday feast. A festive, pagan celebration set in a palace, with debauchery and corruption, sensual entertainment, and a grisly presentation of John the Baptist's head on a platter to cap the night. One king's feast ends in the ruthless death of a saint.

The second royal meal is not set in a palace, but it's in a wilderness. Compassion, healing, wholeness, and peace fill the atmosphere. King Jesus' feast begins with a paltry sample of some bread and a few fish and ends with filled bellies for everyone and an abundance of leftovers.

King Herod's feast is all about status, pomp, high ranking guests, and the royal abundance fit for an earthly king. It's the feast of envy for those on the outside looking in. Yet, as grand as it is, lurking over his table is fear, pride, exploitation, and death.

King Jesus, on the other hand, is withdrawn from all those power-hungry gods in a solitary place, literally a wilderness. His heart is heavy at the news of John the Baptist's death. As he grieves his loss, the needy crowds spot him and gather to him. Despite inadequate provisions and a heavy spirit, King Jesus waves them to himself, bringing healing, wholeness, peace, and abundance.

These two contrasting feasts speak to us today. The feast of the godless tantalizes with its delicacies, entertainments, image, and stature. It starts grand and euphoric but always leaves its guests unsatisfied, uncertain, and with an awful hole in the soul. Jesus' feast, on the other hand, provides a place for all who come to the table with nothing to offer-- whether weary, broken, hungry, or helpless. His feast protects community and leaves every guest filled and satisfied.

The palace setting exalts self-sufficiency and exclusive privilege; it bears the marks of a godless world. The wilderness setting screams insufficiency and desolation; yet Jesus' presence turns the wilderness into revelations of his kingdom, where compassion, abundant provision, and satisfaction pop up out of thin air.

What does this feast in the wilderness tell us about Jesus' nature and his kingdom? What does this story expose in our own attitudes when we find ourselves stuck in a desolate place with limited resources, limited help, low energy, and no food? Do we shrink away or look at Jesus with expectation and faith?

Look at these two stories. One godless king filled with riches while producing death in his palace. One heavenly King whose servants come with little but find healing and wholeness in the wilderness. Jesus won't promise his people a life without need, sorrow or limitation. Yet, this divine meal in the wilderness is a glimpse of the coming feast in a kingdom where hunger, poverty, lack, and destitution will be no more.

We, the church, are called to bring that kingdom glimpse into our communities through proclaiming the good news, sharing burdens, practicing generosity, and offering hospitality here in Vacaville and beyond. When Jesus looks at us, and says, "You give them something to eat," what is our response going to be?

Let's dive into the miracle story.

The Compassionate King (Matt. 14:13-14)

In 14:13-14, the grieving Jesus withdraws into an isolated place. When he saw the crowd gathering around him, he had compassion on them. Alright, this is just after hearing that his beloved John the Baptist was gruesomely killed. A natural man might leave compassion to the wind after hearing of such awful tragedy. The natural man might be consumed with vengeance and indignant anger. He might go away to the solitary place to plot revenge as his rage boils over.

Not so with Jesus. As the needy crowd followed and stayed with him, he didn't push them away. He didn't say, "Hey, now's not the time!" He was filled with compassion. His compassion burst through his grief.

My friends, forget revenge when vengeance is warranted. Move with compassion on the people who desperately need compassion. This world inflicts and afflicts. The world's powers consume and destroy, exploit and manipulate. The world's feast, like Herod's, ends with the head of the righteous on a platter. Jesus' feast starts with the broken and lost getting healed up and made whole. Jesus, though once broken and afflicted himself, offers the bread of eternity to the broken and afflicted, to the desperate and empty souls.

As a missional church, our ministry begins just like Christ's ministry. Jesus looked with compassion. Did he judge? No. Might he have had reason to judge the people there? Yes. He did not. He looked with compassion. This is where we begin. Seeing people as Jesus sees them... not with judgment, but with compassion.

The King Commands His Disciples to Bring Their Little to Him (Matthew 14:15–18)

In 15-18, evening approaches and the disciples tell Jesus to send the crowds away, it's getting late! There's nothing around, no food carts. Somebody forgot to announce the potluck! The disciples see the hungry crowd, they know they're woefully underprepared, but they forget who they're with. The disciples recognize the scarcity of the situation more than they recognize the King in their midst.

Jesus confronts this scarcity mindset and tells them, "You give them something to eat." Wow! "You give them something to eat." The disciples are instructed to do the impossible BEFORE Jesus does anything. The task at hand, by Jesus' instruction, was enormous and impossible barring the miraculous. Here's what the disciples missed: this was the King of God's kingdom telling them to give them something to eat. When the King of God's kingdom tells you to do something impossible, he's never asking you to do it on your own. In the world's kingdom, you're pretty much on your own. In the Lord's kingdom, you're not!

So, the disciples go and search for food among the crowd. They could not have gone into the neighboring villages, bought food, and returned in time. That would have taken too long. Plus, they did not have enough money or the capacity to buy and carry such a large amount. Imagine the logistics of preparing food for a stadium full of people! So they went into the crowd searching and were only able to find a measly five loaves and two fish. What a dry crowd!

Five loaves and two fish. I imagine they heard Jesus' voice ringing in their ears, "You give them something to eat," as they looked at this paltry sampling of food. This is the call that I hope rings in our ears too: "You give them something to eat." Even when we look at the very little in our hands. You give them something to eat. Who is "them?" Them is our surrounding community—those whom Christ has called us to. As we look out at those in desperate need of soul food, let the voice of Jesus ring in our ears, "You give them something to eat."

We might look at what we have and think, that is not enough. We don't have enough resources. We don't have enough people. We don't have enough food. What we have is paltry. Well, none of that matters when the King of God's kingdom asks us to give them something to eat. The disciples brought back the tiny sampling, only enough for two men maybe, and they said, "This is all we have." Jesus said, "Bring them here to me." Bring what little you have to me.

Lack is no lack in the hands of the King. It does not matter if the church is lacking resources and provisions, the Lord is her Provider. It does not matter if you lack the provision you need-- the Lord is your Provider. All Jesus asks is, "Bring what you have to me." Bring what you have. The Lord calls us into what only he can accomplish. And he calls his disciples to have a part in accomplishing the impossible with him.

The Greater Moses, Greater Prophet (Matthew 14:19–21)

The people are directed by Jesus to sit down on the grass for the miracle meal. Matthew does not say, but there is orderliness to the people. There is peace, and an expectation to be fed, not wilderness anxiety or scarcity mentality.

Like a good shepherd, the King graciously gathers the people and makes them lie down in green pastures. You know the 23rd Psalm, "He makes me lie down in green pastures." This is the provision of our Good Shepherd. In traditional shepherd lore, sheep will not lie down unless four strict conditions are met:

1. They feel no fear.
2. They feel no social tension.
3. There are no irritating pests.
4. They feel no hunger.

This is a perfect picture of kingdom provision. The Lord provides us a place where we need not fear. A place where we are free from conflict and parasitic infestations. Where we can rest, full and satisfied, lacking nothing. That is the future kingdom that awaits.

In vs. 19, Jesus took the bread, gave thanks to the heavenly Father, broke it, and gave them to the disciples, a foreshadow of the Lord's Supper in the upper room. Jesus continued breaking and giving while the disciples continued taking and giving to the people, until everyone ate and was satisfied.

My friends, by faith, we bring the little that we have to Jesus. We say, “this is all we have.” Then, we take what Jesus gives us, and we give. When we’ve given all Jesus has given us, we go back to him for more. He provides more. The ministry of compassion seeks the needy and gives. From Hand to hand to hand. From Jesus' hands to our hands to their hands.

Christ provides the bread of life in abundance. We feed the poor and bring healing to the broken, we take on the compassion of Christ—his compassion ministry—to the people he has called us to. Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you." He said, "I have come that you may have life, and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

When the disciples finished feeding the five thousand, they picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces. The provision was more than just enough. It was overflowing. There's a kingdom principle of provision that says, "give and it will come back to you, a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over" (Luke 6:38). Kingdom provision is not just enough to get you by, it is an abundant, divine provision that gives satisfaction.

This miracle points to the greatest miracle in the Old Testament, the manna from heaven during the Exodus, and it echoes another miracle in 2 Kings 4 where the prophet Elisha miraculously fed 100 men with 20 loaves of bread. The miracle tells us that one greater than Moses and the prophets is here. Those OT miracles only point to the Messiah who is the true bread of life. The true bread that gives eternal life.

Jesus said of himself in John 6, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." That is what this story is pointing to. The living bread that came down from heaven, whose life feeds eternal life to all who take from him. At first, you might feel like you're receiving so little from Christ. Maybe you feel like you've had more than your fair share of want and your faith in Christ is just not cutting it. Not giving you what you need. Maybe you've heard the Scripture, "My grace is enough for you," when you came to Jesus feeling like you needed a whole lot more than just his grace.

The Bread of life is an eternal provision that produces and produces, and produces, and never stops producing. His provision isn't always going to look like anything you might expect, but he always gives you exactly what you need at just the right time. So, don't stop coming to Jesus, come to him every day asking for your daily bread. The time will come, my friends, when you will begin to see the abundance, the overflowing fragments, the twelve extra baskets from the bread in the wilderness. Amen.

Missional Application

Here is a suggested missional application from this sermon:

1. **See Our Community Through the Compassion of Christ.**

Jesus saw the crowds and was moved with compassion. As his church, let us be moved with compassion to reach out to those who are hungry and lacking, seeing them as Jesus sees them.

2. **Bring What We Have to Jesus and Trust Him for What We Lack.**

Jesus didn't ask the disciples to give what they didn't have. He told them to bring Him what they did have. We cannot allow our limitations to limit our obedience. Our responsibility is to bring what we have in faith; Christ is responsible for the provision.

3. **Become the Hands That Offer the Bread of Life.**

Jesus provided the bread, but He placed it in the disciples' hands to distribute. Likewise, Christ has entrusted us with the gospel and called us to carry His provision into our community. We are not merely recipients of His abundant grace; we are distributors of it. From His hands to our hands to theirs.

Our missional calling: We are called to make the kingdom of heaven visible in Vacaville—not by parading our abundance, but by demonstrating the eternal, life-giving compassion, generosity, and saving grace of our King. Amen.

Let's pray.

Study Questions
Read Matthew 14:1-21

Observation

1) What news led Jesus to withdraw privately by boat?

2) How does Matthew describe Jesus' response when he saw the crowd?

3) What food did the disciples bring to Jesus?

4) How many basketfuls remained after everyone ate?

Interpretation

1) How do Herod's feast and Jesus' wilderness meal contrast?

2) Why does Jesus tell the disciples, "You give them something to eat"?

3) How does sitting on grass portray the Good Shepherd's provision?

4) How does this miracle identify Jesus as greater than Moses and prophets? As well, what does this miracle reveal to you about the kingdom of heaven?

Application

1) Where do you recognize scarcity more than the King in your midst?

2) What little can you bring to Jesus rather than withholding it?

3) Who in our community needs Christlike compassion instead of judgment?

4) How can you become hands that offer Christ's bread of life?