

July 31, 2011
Matthew 14:13-21

Pentecost 7 (Proper 13A)
Priorities! Where are Yours?

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Priorities and Prioritizing. That's what we have to do nowadays. We have to prioritize our to do lists and we have to have our list of priorities. Most Monday mornings when I get into the office I make a list of what I have to do for the week and there are some top priorities...sermon, bulletin, Wednesday bulletin, any classes I am teaching...then it goes down the list. It's not just me that prioritizes my priorities. We all do it. We all make lists, whether it's on paper or in our minds. It's what society instructs us to do. With the age of technology and everything coming so fast and furious, distractions come our way. Our lives are so busy, most things seem important-but we can't do everything.

It seems funny to us that our Savior would be concerned with such things, but he is. Our Savior PRIORTIZED. He knows what is most important in his life. When our lists grow to long and we become distracted from the most important things we can hopefully learn to trust that our Savior, the one who prioritizes, has You in his hand.

Sometimes our lists in life get long, perhaps like a grocery list. And if you know a grocery store well enough you can make your list according to the aisle. Produce first, then bakery, meat, pantry items, freezer items all to follow. Then there is always that strange item or the item that they moved and you can't find it...you become frustrated. Or you become distracted because you are shopping while hungry and everything looks so good, so you get frustrated even then because you've gone away from your list.

Life can sometimes seem like a grocery list that unravels to the point of spinning out of control. We just can't seem to prioritize anymore. Our priorities are out of whack. So many demands are made of us nowadays, so many expectations, so many dreams and aspirations, so many good intentions, that we become overwhelmed.

Think about for a moment with me. Where are your priorities? Over the last couple of weeks we have been looking at the children of Israel and we have seen how they turned their back on God and went looking different directions. They got their priorities messed up. It's a phenomenon that crosses church denominations, affects churches of every shape and size. It doesn't matter if their Lutheran, Baptist, or Catholic. Doesn't matter if their music is lead with a guitar or organ. It's the fact that we are losing our young people to the world. In the newsletter that is in your mailboxes I wrote that in our church body that 13 years ago we baptized 47,000 infants and this year we confirmed 19,000 youth. After that the numbers drop even more. On Confirmation Sunday, I preached a sermon where I said, "Do not let our kids become statistics." Well, I am afraid they have. It's because our priorities in America are messed up. We put more emphasis on sports—football, basketball, volleyball, baseball, softball, and yes even power lifting--, education, finding the best college to go after high school, becoming the most popular. We put our emphasis on our pocketbooks; we want our wallets to become even thicker. We don't want to sacrifice for the sake of our society.

Marriage and family values have taken a backseat. It's okay out there in the world to live together before marriage. It's okay to never be married. It's even okay now for two

men or two women to be married. And family values those are gone. You see gone are the days of Sunday's reserved for church and family, gone are the days that Wednesday's are church night...now it is non-sports night. All that is in the past, but we have to work through. Priorities are messed up and the one thing that should be most important in our life seems to be thing that drops out. Our faith, our God and our Church.

We wonder why our lives become so stressed. It really is no secret, we prioritize one way and then someone or something else pulls at us and get us out of focus. IT's like having a cell phone. One can be reached every time, everywhere. You can check your email and browse the internet. You can even text with your friends. Things distract us.

It's at times like these we find ourselves turning to God and we really don't know why. But What god do we turn to. We are frazzled and stressed and need some guidance. Perhaps we are like the crowds in our text from Matthew 14: *"Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns."* What news did Jesus just hear. Terrible, terrible news...that's why he went to a desolate place. John the Baptist was beheaded and not only was that...King Herod convinced that Jesus was John the Baptist back from the dead. Jesus had to prioritize. He knew John's death meant his death was coming close. Jesus knew that Herod was a crazy guy so he took his disciples and headed to undisclosed location. He needed time to teach his disciples more about the plan of Salvation. But before he could get anywhere, a huge crowd had assembled.

This crowd that had assembled was there only for their wants and desires. They hoped that Jesus was someone special; they had seen him do miracles before. Each and every one of those in the crowd had their own priority list...their lists of expectations, burdens, worries, concerns and they each wanted Jesus to sort them out.

Jesus again knows the importance of priorities: ¹⁴ *When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.* Jesus needs his own rest, but he doesn't turn his back on a needy people. That's because he put their priorities ahead of his own. Jesus even identified their greatest spiritual need. He not only healed the sick, but in Luke's account, he tells us that Jesus actually welcomed the crowd and spoke to them about the Kingdom of God.

Our Savior is all-sufficient. He knows our priorities and which ones are most important, even when we don't have a clue. He prioritizes our grocery list—called life. He touches us with his compassion and leads us to realize that's what he needs to be first in our lives.

Jesus can handle the grocery list of your life. He will satisfy your needs. Just look at the grocery list that was growing for Jesus in our text: ¹⁵ *Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves."* The disciples are now the anxious ones. It was late in the day, going past the evening meal time...and out of anxiety the disciples counted 5000 men...plus women and children so the total

was probably around 15,000 people. Now that's getting out of control. That is 15 times the size of Necedah.

What did the disciples do...well they turned to themselves and started to go through the crowd to see who has any food.

SO it with us as well...when life gets out of hand, we tend to look to ourselves or to each other for solutions. Our lives become unhappy and we try to fill the gaps on our own. We become so disenchanted, and so we decide it's time for a new hobby and off we run...bouncing from one activity to the other--Trying to satisfy our demands for pleasure. Before we know it our lives aren't any happier. Instead we seem worse than before. Our list grows and grows, the demands and expectations are higher and we begin to feel completely inadequate. These worries and inabilities blind us to the obvious truth: we have a Savior who loves us dearly and who will care for our needs. He puts our priorities ahead of his own...cause he knows what we really need.

TO be honest we are oblivious to the obvious. ¹⁶ *But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."* ¹⁷ *They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish."* ¹⁸ *And he said, "Bring them here to me."* The disciples seem to have forgotten the miracles Jesus has done...miracles of healing. Don't you think he could nourish them as well? They were focused on the overwhelming need and their own inabilities to meet it.

So when you are overwhelmed...take that unmanageable list of priorities – the things you feel you are supposed to be, but aren't, your list of failures and regrets, all those expectations that you have...take the list and give it to Jesus. Let him do your shopping. Trust him that he will meet your needs. But in fact, he already has. He has earned salvation for you. No matter what may come in this life, the most important details have been met. Jesus has prioritized your priorities for you.

A small meal becomes a huge feast. The Savior of your life has you in his hand. Our little lives become eternal in the hands of Jesus. He paid all that you owed. He paid the price so that he could be number one in your life. Quite often the words are simple: *"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come; buy wine and milk without money and without price.*

Jesus brought this truth home in this miracle...a miracle that no one forgets...²⁰ *And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over.* You see God more than met their needs...he gave them an abundance.

Nowadays smart phones run rampant in our lives. Our to do lists, schedules are on them. They help us prioritize, but Jesus is the true smart one, for he holds us in the Palm of his hands. Jesus knows how to prioritize...he put you first. He died for you and rose for you so that you can live. He opens the gates of heaven for you so that when your time does come, you can meet him face to face. Jesus Christ puts you first. You are most important to him. So where are your priorities? Where is Jesus in your life? Amen

Now may the peace of Christ, which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.