

Teachings of Jesus

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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Jesus' Teaching in the Gospel of Matthew (Part IV)

14:13-21, The Feeding of the 5,000

He was moved with compassion for them: Jesus' compassion for people moved Him to both heal them and to teach them. God's love, mercy, and grace are ever-present and always in evidence, though our human condition, and the way we process the events in our lives, often hinder us from understanding it. His compassion does not "save" His people from pain, suffering, grief, etc. The grace of God, from our perspective, is complex, and sometimes difficult to understand, but it is always perfect.

There was no *physical* necessity to feed this large crowd. These were people who were used to skipping meals, and they certainly expected nothing from Jesus in terms of physical sustenance. Yet Jesus's compassion lead him to do something extraordinary, visible, and unforgettable.

They didn't need a meal; they (and we) needed a lesson on God's great love and provision for His people.

You give them something to eat: Jesus challenges both the compassion *and the faith* of the disciples. He did not ask them to meet the need relying on their own abilities.

We have here only five loaves and two fish: Really, Jesus and His disciples have even less than that. We learn from John's account (John 6:9) that these items were actually obtained from a little boy in the crowd. It seems that Jesus and His inner circle traveled light!

He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass: This command suggests that what was about to happen was more than putting food in their stomachs; that could be done standing up. Sitting to eat together brings to mind the image of a banquet.

Looking up to heaven, He blessed...: Jesus blessed God for the small amount of food that He did have. He may have prayed a common Jewish prayer before a meal: “Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.”

He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes: No one knew where this bread actually came from, how or when it appeared. Was it replaced piece by piece after some was handed out? We just don’t know. Jesus shows here that God can provide out of resources that we can neither see or perceive in our circumstances.

This miracle demonstrates Jesus’ complete authority over His creation. But it’s also instructive that He performed this miracle using the hands of His disciples. There is no indication in the text that Jesus Himself handed out a single piece of food. To this day Jesus desires to use His disciples to bless His world.

The disciples *gave*, but could do so only because God *provided*.

They all ate and were filled: God’s provision was abundant, even over-abundant! They collected and presumably used what was left over to carry on their work, and/or to feed others.

Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children: That there were 5,000 men suggests a total perhaps of 15,000 or more people in total.

This miracle is recorded in all four gospels, telling us that both the Holy Spirit and the early church thought this story was important, as more than just an example of Jesus’ ability to perform miracles:

- It shows that Jesus could feed the people of God, just as Israel was fed in the wilderness. There was a common expectation that the Messiah would restore the provision of manna, and this adds to the messianic credentials of Jesus.
- It shows that Jesus had compassion and care for the people of God, even when we might have expected His patience would be exhausted.
- It shows that Jesus chose to work through the hands of the disciples, even when doing so was not essential to produce the immediate result.

- It shows a preview example of the great messianic banquet that the Messiah will enjoy with His people.

14:22-33, Jesus Walks on the Water

Jesus made His disciples get into the boat: Why the hasty departure? He wanted to be alone to pray. He wanted to escape the crowd and get some rest. He wanted the crowd to disperse and go home so as to avoid a messianic mob scene (John 6:15). We don't know if the disciples shared the enthusiasm of the crowd, but if they did – perhaps sensing that now was the time to openly reveal Jesus as the Messiah and King – then it was more important than ever for Jesus to get the disciples away from the excitement of the crowd.

Also, it was time for another lesson/revelation for His closest disciples.

The Sea of Galilee is well known for its sudden storms, but during this particular storm Jesus wasn't in the boat with His disciples.

In the fourth watch of the night: This was somewhere between 3:00 and 6:00 A.M. According to Mark (Mark 6:47-52), Jesus came to the disciples when the boat was in the middle of the sea and after they had exhausted themselves rowing against the waves and windy storm.

Jesus went to them, walking on the sea: The matter-of-factness with which Matthew states this is striking. Jesus walking on the water was a huge shock to the disciples; they were terrified, and maybe questioned their own sanity on account of what they saw!

Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid: Jesus immediately comforts and assures them, alleviating their fear. Fear, let alone terror, tends to make you amplify any problem you think you have.

Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water: We have no idea exactly what prompted Peter to ask such a question, but his faith in Jesus was remarkable, because he actually responded to Jesus' invitation and got out of the boat! Each of the miracles the disciples had witnessed up to this point were preparing them for supernatural leaps of faith.

But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out: This is a wonderful picture of walking in faith, showing that Peter was able to do the miraculous as long as he looked to Jesus. When he saw that the wind was dangerous, he was distracted by fear and began to sink. Such is human nature, even for the Christian: sometimes achieving great things, and falling apart in little things.

“Lord, save me!!!” (*exclamation marks are mine, but...*): Even when Peter failed, Jesus was there to save him. Peter knew who to call out to at the moment of crisis. Jesus then brought Peter back to the boat. That must’ve been quite a sight for the others, Jesus and Peter, hand in hand, walking back to the boat on the sea.

O you of little faith, why did you doubt?: Literally “little-faithed one” (ὀλιγόπιστος, “oli-gOP-istos”) Jesus is stating a fact, and is not denigrating the quality or quantity of their faith. He is prompting them to consider the foundations of their doubt. Perhaps doubts by Peter and the disciples might be understandable, but were *completely* unfounded.

We are all “little-faithed ones”. But remember:

- Little faith is true faith
- Little faith hears the word of God
- Little faith draws us to Jesus
- Little faith can accomplish great things
- Little faith prays when it is in trouble
- Little faith is safe, because Jesus is near

Why did you doubt: Jesus only asks this question after Peter was rescued. And at that point it was an entirely reasonable question to ask. Why did Peter doubt?

Those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him: They moved quickly from fearing the storm to worshipping Jesus. This was a faithful reaction, considering both the power Jesus showed in walking on the water, and the love He showed in rescuing the self-sinking Peter.