**Matthew 14:13-21 (ESV)**

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. **14** When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. **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.” **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.” **19** Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. **20** And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. **21** And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

**“True Provision Provided”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. The continued murder of Christians in Iraq and Syria calls for a moment of silence. It should be this way each day until it ceases. Convert, pay up, or die is that motto that leaves no room for compromise. One of the most ancient Christians communities in the world is under attack. It is very sad and disturbing news similar to when Jesus heard that John the baptizer died by the hand of Herod. Not only was John a flesh and blood cousin, he was the forerunner, the preacher of repentance, the one crying out in the wilderness over the Lamb of God. Just as death deals a blow in our lives, such news interrupted the ministry of Jesus making Him withdraw to a desolate place.

Certainly, when Jesus left the crowd it was not to abandon them. Heavier matters pressed upon God’s Son that had eternal weight. It would be a year away before He would meet the need to lay down His life for sinners. The cross became all the clearer to Jesus at the death of John. Yet, how remarkable was it that the crowds followed Him into desolation? In this place detached from comforts and community was a people gathered around Jesus. As much as the murder of Christians is a call for prayer and even a warning for us on this side of the world. We cannot forget who is with us no matter how desolate the times may be. Plenty still need what God alone gives by the Gospel. Christ provides and His promise fills the hungry with good things.

The temptation is to jump right to the miracle of feeding the 5,000. Yet, the greater miracle stands out in our text for us to see. God provides His care in spite of the circumstances. Jesus had compassion on the crowds when He saw them. Their condition was poor and in need. People dragging out the sick, lame, and those without strength. Regardless if Jesus knew the people did not seek a Savior, but a miracle worker. Regardless if His own personal interest was to withdraw at the news of John’s death. The heart of Christ poured out with love to heal and it came with the teaching of His kingdom.

Part of daily necessities is for the baptized to confess the fullness of justification. God no longer is picking a fight with anyone because of Jesus. The Greek word for this kind of compassion sounds like something being poured out, evsplagcnisqh. Anything and everything in this life God compassionately spills out, evsplagcnisqh, from His goodness. Not merely for Christians, but the crowds of a sinful world. What a miracle to find such generosity going out to sinners! The Small Catechism sums up this way, “God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people…” In spite of it all, God looks upon us with His goodness that has great compassion to give.

The miracle of feeding 5,000 intensifies this focus of giving. God calls for the true provision of mercy not might of men. Yet, the disciples at first did not see it that way. They were more worried about managing a situation far outside of their hands. Jesus put their plans to shame saying, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” The right reaction was to turn to Christ in repentance to provide for what He asked. Instead, sinful reasoning made them captive to the five loaves of bread and two fish. They were relying on works, when only Christ could save the disciples by His Word. Only faith comes by hearing and so they heard Him say, “Bring them here to me.”

Rather than passing the buck, the buck stops at the body of Christ. His Church hears Him saying, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” That “you” is to each individual among the baptized concerned with mercy toward others and not our might. Of course, if it was about works, about how much to do or how well do it. Every one of us would end up in foolishness worse than the disciples troubled over bread and fish. Luther says, “…we get nothing out of our careful figuring and calculating except sorrow and loss of spirit. It would be much better for us to commend the whole matter to God and not think so much about our needs” (Bul’s notes). He does not mean toss cares to the wind, but we need more room and a bigger place for repentance and prayer that looks to Christ for all things.

You would expect a reaction from the crowd of 10,000+ people present that evening. Yet, they did not seem to grasp where all the food came from only to eat their fill. However, just as the disciples asked questions about the parables, they saw who provided what was impossible to give. God promises more than food, but life-giving fullness in Him. The leftover baskets served as a witness to Jesus and His love. Rather than seeking prosperity, it was to prosper in the promise of Christ for sinners. Care for the needy was evident, but the center was only the bread of life come down from heaven. The Old Testament reading emphasized what God finally was to pour out by His cross for a sinful world. The Lord declared, “Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live.”

Christ still comes to feed us with the miracle of a feast. Better than bread and fish is His true body and blood as promised by His Word. On the night of Christ’s death, an endless supply of compassion poured out. This meal cannot be exhausted. Forgiveness is for you to eat and drink to be satisfied by Him who is your life and salvation. Why come to the Divine Service at Church? Is it to learn information, promote a program, or make life better? How about Jesus is faithful to come and forgive by His Word. He provides Himself as the food without question for the needs of both body and soul. From the Lord’s Supper, we turn with whatever gifts He has given to use in service to His kingdom. We can neither ignore the needs others have nor become overwhelmed as if these needs rests on us and not the better God who gives out of His love. Christ provides and His promise fills the hungry with good things. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.