

Matthew 14:13-21 *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. ¹⁴When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. ¹⁵As 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." ¹⁶Jesus 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. ¹⁹And 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. ²⁰They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

The disciples saw all the problems and none of the possibilities. They had gone with Jesus to a solitary place to spend some quiet time alone for rest and for private speaking and instructions. But that didn't last very long. The large crowds followed after them interrupting their time together. Though Jesus had compassion on the people and saw this as an opportunity to serve them spiritually, it appears the disciples saw this as a bother. They seemed even more frustrated by the fact that the people had not thought ahead far enough to remember to bring food to eat. It was getting late and there was no food for the people to eat. The disciples had a genuine concern. There were upwards of 20,000 people in this gathering. They could do the math and figure out it would take many month's wages to feed this large crowd—money they didn't have. Even if they did, it was getting near impossible for them to get to the surrounding villages and back with enough food in the right time to feed the crowd. They had sought a solution on their own but came up with only 5 loaves of bread and two fish. It doesn't take an advanced math degree to understand that wasn't even close enough to feed this kind of a crowd. There was only one option left in their minds—it was time for the people to go! Jesus needed to release the crowds so they could make it to the villages to get food before the markets closed. They were well aware of the problems that stood before them yet failed to see all of the possibilities.

While they had weighed what they thought were all the possibilities, there was one they missed. Their math didn't fail them, but their faith did. They didn't understand what kind of a Lord they had in Jesus. He was the first place they should have turned in a crisis. They had been with him long enough to have known this. When the wedding party ran out of wine as Jesus began his ministry, Mary brought the problem to Jesus and he solved it with his almighty power by changing the water into wine. On many different occasions, when people brought to Jesus those who were sick and suffered from various diseases, severe pain, the demon-possessed, those who had seizures and those who had been paralyzed, Jesus used his almighty power to heal them. They had seen him calm the storm when it was so violent that they thought they were going to drown. When the synagogue ruler had brought to Jesus the fact that his daughter had died, Jesus used his almighty power to raise that little girl from the dead and bring her to life. On many different occasions before this Jesus had done miracles which pointed to his love and compassion for people and his almighty power to help them. Whenever people brought their problems to Jesus, his compassion led him to do what he could to help them. Through these miracles Jesus had given testimony that he was more than just a man or a great teacher but the almighty Son of God who had been sent into this world as the Christ whom God had promised. He had given many examples of how much he cared not only about the spiritual needs of the people but their physical needs as well. The disciples had seen all of this yet in the heat of the moment lost sight of it. They locked on to the scarcity and lack of resources which they possessed and lost sight of the care and power of Jesus to help them through this situation. They saw only the problems before them and not all of the possibilities.

So Jesus used this as an opportunity to teach his disciples to trust in him. He wanted them to bring their problems to him first as they entered into a crisis. He wanted them in all problems and troubles to turn first to him and trust that he would answer their prayers and help them through any trial. When the disciples in despair responded to Jesus that all they had were 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish, Jesus' answer is one that should be etched into our minds: Bring them to me! Jesus can use whatever his disciples bring to solve the problem before them. When they brought what they had to Jesus, look what Jesus did with it. He had the people sit down. After he prayed and blessed the food, he gave it to the disciples to begin handing out. The food the disciples brought to Jesus multiplied miraculously. Not only did everyone have more than enough to eat, but there were 12 full baskets left over. Jesus provided and then some! What a lesson this was for the disciples. Jesus cared not only about the spiritual needs of his people but the physical needs as well. Jesus not only cares about the needs of his people, but he also has the power and ability to help his people meet those needs.

Bring them to Jesus! What a lesson this is for us as we think about the needs and crises we encounter in life. This is a lesson we need because we are more like the disciples than what we like to admit. We see all of the problems that are before us but fail to see the possibilities alongside of them. We fail to see the good that can come out of the problems which present themselves to us. We fail to see the challenges as an opportunities for God to strengthen us or for him to display

his divine power and providence to us. What in reality is an improbable situation we view as impossible. We forget about God's care for us and his almighty power to help us. We doubt that God would care enough about us or our situation to step in and use his power to help us. So as we are confronted with the problems and challenges of life, we let them paralyze us and lead us to despair. We evaluate our own resources and our own powers and abilities to meet the challenges and we cry out in despair that there is no way we could ever meet these problems. We see the lack of resources we have and how from an earthly standpoint we don't see how something can be done to meet the situation before us. We all too easily forget that we have an all sufficient Savior who loves us dearly and who will care for all of our needs. We are blinded from the fact that we have a compassionate and all powerful Lord who can help us and who will always provide the best solution to what we might view as insurmountable problems. We shoulder the burden ourselves and blame and accuse God that he doesn't care or won't help.

When a chronic or even terminal illness comes on us, rather than going to God first and trusting that he cares and can help, we seek our own solutions to the problem. Like the disciples we try every available avenue first thinking that the cure to our problem lies in the marvels of modern medicine instead of remembering God holds us in his hands and will provide healing in his way and in his time. When jobs get lost or salaries are cut and times get tough financially at home, we are tempted to take the burden on our own shoulders to figure out a solution to the problem. This often leads people to do sinful things they would never do—cheat, lie, steal—just to make ends meet rather than trusting in God to provide and bringing the problem to him.

We do this with things at church, too. How often doesn't a congregation fail to move forward to meet a unique and special ministry opportunity all because they were paralyzed by the scarcity before them and failed to trust that God could provide what they needed to meet this opportunity? How often don't we focus our attention the money problem before us and fail to consider that God could bless us in ways which we never even knew? I look back to our past and have to ask: hasn't God done this for us? Just in the 12 years I have been here we have faced our share of financial problems and fretted tremendously about how we were going to make ends meet. That doesn't even touch those things which happened over the 50 years of this congregation before I came here. Yet here we are! God has kept his promises and always provided what we needed. God not only cares about our spiritual needs but our physical needs as well. We can bring our problems to Jesus with the confidence he cares about us and will help us.

As we consider the all-powerful, fully sufficient Savior we have who loves us and promised to provide for us, how ashamed we are of the lack of trust we have at times displayed in him. We've trusted in our abilities to see us through our problems and failed to trust God would keep his promise to provide. We've let ourselves be paralyzed by the lack of resources which we saw before us and doubted God's ability to provide in ways we couldn't even imagine. We have allowed ourselves to get worked up with anxiety and filled with fear because we trusted in ourselves more than we trusted in God. We too have seen all the problems and none of the possibilities. Let's call this what it is. This is more than weakness. It is sin. Lack of faith in God to keep his promises is sin. We are just as guilty of this as anyone. With this sin we bow before our Lord, begging for his mercy and grace and knowing the punishment we deserve.

The compassion Jesus had on those who followed him in our text is the same compassion that led him to come down to this earth as our Savior. When the devil tried to tempt Jesus to take matters into his own hands as he fasted 40 days and 40 nights, Jesus fully relied on his heavenly Father to take care of him and provide for him. Jesus never once doubted the promises of his heavenly Father or sought to take matters into his own hands. So when he offered himself on Calvary's cross, he did so as the perfect Son of God, offering himself not for his sins but for your sins and mine. When we bring our sins to Jesus, he wipes them away and washes us clean with his blood, forgiving our sins and guaranteeing us of eternal life.

As Jesus cares about our spiritual needs, he cares about our physical needs as well. So bring them to Jesus! He wants to help. He has the power to help. He can help in ways that you and I can't even imagine! Like the disciples in our text, we may only be able to offer what is meek and meager and what doesn't seem even close to enough to meet the need before us, but God can use whatever we bring to him to meet our needs and provide for us. He may not always meet these needs with miracles. A wise man once said, "God blesses sweat." God wants us to bring our problems to him but he also wants us to offer our best. He wants us to make wise decisions and work for the blessings he provides. He provides food through natural processes of nature: the sun shines, the rain falls, seeds sprout and multiply, animals reproduce and grow and through them God provides food. He provides financial resources for us to overcome difficult situations, but we have to go through the hard work of finding a job and working hard at that job. God uses doctors and nurses, medicines and therapies to help heal us. He does care and he has the ability to help.

So trust in God to provide for you in all things. Remember who is on our side—the almighty, eternal God who loves us and cares for us. He displayed that love for you in sending Jesus to be your Savior. He will help you through whatever need presents itself. Rather than being the last place you turn, go first to your Lord when problems and troubles come your way. Remember his promise and power to help you no matter how improbable the situation seems. Let God use the challenges and crises that you face as opportunities to strengthen your faith in him as he displays his love for you. Be confident he will remain faithful to his promises. When problems and troubles come your way, ***Bring Them to Jesus.*** Amen.