**Year A – Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost**

**Matthew 14:13-21**

**August 20, 2017**

Jesus Is Our Great Provider

1. With a tender heart he has compassion on us (Vv13-17)
2. With almighty power he meets all of our needs (Vv18-21)

Introduction

Bills, bills, bills! They are ever-present, aren’t they? Beginning with taxes. Whether your taxes are removed from your paycheck, or whether you have to pay them quarterly or at the end of the year, that is a massive and often painful bill to pay to the government. Then comes your mortgage or rent. You certainly need a roof over your head! So a large chunk of your hard earned money goes to that. If you own, a large chunk also goes to home improvements, and maintenance, and property taxes, and insurance. You’re also going to need food and drink, so there goes the grocery bill. Perhaps you are paying off your college education, your car, so a large chunk of your paycheck goes there as well. There are electrical bills, water bills, medical bills, and the list goes on and on. What a pain bills are!

As we so often get caught up in the day-to-day worries of our lives, one of our greatest stressors is this: “How will I make ends meet? How can I pay enough and have some left over to save as well for the future? How will all my needs both present and future be met?”

The answer: Jesus. Oh I’m not saying that he will rain down money from heaven, that he’ll write you a big check so that your bills will disappear. But he is our great provider. He gives us all we need. Today we see that he has compassion on us with a tender heart, and he meets all our needs with his almighty power.

Setting the scene

Today’s great miracle from Jesus occurs when the Jewish Passover Feast is near, so it’s about a year before Jesus suffers and dies. John the Baptist had been beheaded by King Herod. Some of John’s disciples had approached Jesus and told him this heartbreaking news. Jesus had sent out the twelve disciples in groups of two on their first missionary journeys to the surrounding cities and towns. They had returned and were anxious to tell Jesus what they had done in His name.

This is also a period in which Jesus’ ministry is changing. He wouldn’t turn away the crowds; he would still meet them from time to time to preach and heal their sick, but now more and more he would withdraw with his disciples. It was time for him to teach and train them for their ministries after he would leave the world. The climax of his mission in this world was approaching! He would soon be crucified for the sins of the world. So he needed to prepare his disciples for that as well.

And so, with all these things happening, Jesus withdraws to spend some quiet time with his disciples.

Part 1: With a tender heart he has compassion on us (Vv13-17)

We pick up today’s text again, “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.” Not only was it important for Jesus to spend private time alone with his disciples, it’s also important for us to spend quiet time alone with our Lord for quiet meditation and reflection upon his Word. May we always make a point of that in our often-too-busy lives—spend private time in the Word of God and prayer.

But it is almost impossible for Jesus to escape the crowds. The region that he is withdrawing to is probably Bethsaida, on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, but people from all the little towns and villages along the more populated western shore of the Sea of Galilee walked around the northern shore of the lake just so they could see Jesus. So often we find every reason and excuse to not be with our Savior in Word and Sacrament, but these people would not be denied.

The events continue, “When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.” The Greek word *esplagchnisthe* is translated here as “He had compassion on them”. Another good translation would be “he was filled with tenderness” or “his heart went out to them.” Mark’s account of the story says that Jesus had compassion on them “because they were like sheep without a shepherd.”

And isn’t that what we were before we came to know Christ: “sheep without a shepherd”? You’ve heard time and time again what dumb animals sheep are. They wander away from the flock for no reason, they get tangled up in thorns and thickets, they find themselves in the deadly company of hungry wolves and bears. And what is our life like without our Good Shepherd? Well, without Jesus, our life has very little meaning. We are born, we try to enjoy as much success as possible, perhaps try to help people as much as possible, and then we die and go to hell because of our many sins. What a tragedy human life is without Jesus!

But Jesus is filled with tenderness for us. His heart goes out to us. He has compassion on us. That compassion means that the way that Jesus looks at humans is so much different than the way others look at their fellowman. There are some who look at their fellowman like the disciples did, saying, “Send the crowds away! These hungry people are a nuisance to us and our plans!” There are others who look at sick and hungry people with greater sympathy.

But both of those attitudes fall far short of the true love and compassion Jesus gives people. That compassion and tenderness took Jesus through being whipped, and beaten, and punched, and spit upon, and crucified. In his cry from the cross, “Father, forgive them!” we see his dear heart going out to sinful human beings. In one of the greatest of our Lenten hymns, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” we behold the face of our Savior Jesus on the cross, and we see that “sorrow and love flow mingled down.” Yes, the tender heart of Jesus had compassion on us. Compassion to save us and win heaven for us.

Part 2: With almighty power he meets all of our needs (Vv18-21)

And as if that wasn’t enough, he uses his almighty power to meet all our needs! The disciples weren’t as compassionate; they wanted the people to go away. “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.’” Jesus again shows his compassion and his providing hand, “Jesus replied, ‘They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.’ ‘We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,’ they answered. ‘Bring them here to me,’ he said.”

“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 his disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.”

Many of us are very familiar with this story. Five loaves of bread, two fish, Jesus uses these to feed a group that was counted at 5,000 men, not including women and children. So this very easily could have been a group of 15,000 people or greater! That would almost fill up the Chesapeake Energy Arena downtown! All were starving. Yet all were fed, all were satisfied, from 5 loaves of bread and two fish. In fact, twelve large basketfuls of food were left over! A few growing teenage boys by themselves could have eaten five loaves of bread and two fish! Yet Jesus fed the multitude with them.

And has he not fed us as well? Think about it. When is the last time you were starving and hadn’t eaten for days? Not because you were fasting or something, but because you couldn’t find or afford food? When is the last time anyone you know has been starving for days? Oh, I mentioned bills earlier, and they can be stressors for us, but has our Lord not supplied for all our bodily needs—and then some? Even in our vast nation of 330 million people, has our Lord not provided food enough for all? Oh, some have more than others. Some might be jealous of what others have. And perhaps we find ourselves being jealous of our neighbor from time to time. Perhaps we find ourselves not helping someone who might literally be starving. May we repent of both sinful extremes—our jealousy of others who have more than us, and our indifference to those who are truly in need.

But our Lord has given us everything. From the food on our tables to the shelter over our heads to the air we breathe. He has given us the ability to work and provide for our families. For those who don’t truly have that ability, he has given you generous Christian brothers and sisters to help provide for your every need. And as if our basic needs weren’t enough, almost all of us drove here today in personal climate-controlled vehicles with personal computers in our pockets that are connected to the entire world! When we pray in the Lord’s Prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread,” our Lord has responded with, “Here you go. In abundance. From all the riches of my grace, it’s yours. You have all you need, and far more than you need. I could gather up far more than twelve basketfuls of leftovers after the lifelong feast of blessing I have given you.”

Conclusion

And so, what is the answer for our daily stressors? Our bills and such? Well, take everything to the Lord in prayer. Realize how much the Lord has blessed you with. He has provided for our every need up to this point, and then some, and then some more. Give back as generously as you can to the Lord who has blessed you with so much. Do it as long as you are on this planet. And then, know this. Even if he were to withdraw his providing hand from you, even if he were to cause you to suffer and even die, which we all will someday, he has provided heaven for you. It’s a place of infinite abundance, and blessing, and joy forevermore.

And it’s all given to you by your compassionate, tenderhearted, loving God, who won it all for you. Jesus is our great provider! Using his almighty providing power to give us everything in love and compassion. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His love endures forever! Amen.