

"JESUS' FEEDING OF THE 4000."

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden

October 7, 2012, 10:30am

Texts for the Sermon: Mark 8:1-10

Introduction.

What do you think of crowds? What's the biggest crowd you have ever been in? A sporting event, a concert, some rally or big conference? I was trying to think what my biggest crowd was, maybe downtown Milwaukee for a Fourth of July fireworks show, over 100K. Phama remembers it too well, we lost little three year old Marc in the crowd and it was a bit terrifying.

How about the crowds on the Guide in Bellingham or at Costco or the mall? Do you try to avoid them, do you stay away or wish they would go away? Do you find yourself getting annoyed or frustrated or impatient? What do you see when you see a huge crowd?

Whenever Jesus saw a great crowd or a great city His heart was stirred with a great compassion. He saw souls, eternal souls dying in their sin and unbelief. No one felt as much as Christ when He saw a great crowd, no one saw so deeply and so eternally.

When you are on the Guide or at Costco or walking through the mall do you see souls, many facing a Christ-less eternity? Are you ever stirred to compassion, stirred to pray?

Many of Jesus' emotions are recorded in Scripture. His joy, sorrow, anger, amazement, gratitude. But no emotion is recorded as often as His compassion.

While He walked among us here on this earth, what He felt most was compassion. Compassion for the hunger and thirst in our souls, for being lost sheep without a shepherd.

The disciples were annoyed and frustrated and impatient with crowds, with people always scrambling for attention. They were always trying to shoo people away and keep everyone away from Jesus. They always wanted to dismiss the poor and needy, people with demands.

There are three things I want us to see about Jesus from our text this morning.

First, the compassion of Jesus to care for the hungry, Mark 8:1-3.

This second feeding of thousands story is told by Mark to put on display Jesus' compassion and kindness toward the poor and needy. The word for compassion here is a word that implies deep feelings toward people one would not naturally feel compassion for, like lepers, the poor, the lame and Gentiles.

The first feeding of the 5000 took place in Jewish Galilee, this feeding of the 4000 takes place on the east side of the Sea of Galilee in the Gentile Decapolis. They were mostly Gentiles, they weren't even His own people, they were without God and without faith.

Jesus knows most of them were just curiosity seekers, He knows they didn't deserve anything and that He didn't owe them anything. But a person with a compassionate heart doesn't go there, they see a need and they care, they do what they can to help and alleviate the need.

There are people all around us who have no interest in Jesus or in His cross whatsoever. How do we feel around those kinds of people? Do you see what Jesus sees, do you see this His eyes? How can we show compassion?

Matthew 5:43-44, 46-47 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ... 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"

Romans 12:14-21 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." 20 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Now let me turn this compassion around. Is there anyone here who's afraid God is out to punish you or can't forgive your terrible sins? Take these words to heart. Jesus is full of compassion. He will receive any one who humbles himself before God. He will forgive anyone who repents and asks forgiveness. Christ's mercy is a deep well. Christ's grace is a rich treasure chest that cannot be out spent.

He knows our world well. He knows our infirmities well. He knows our weaknesses and our fears and our inadequacies. He has mercy on us and feels compassion toward us. You may feel nothing but weakness, failure, defeat and imperfection. Always remember:

Lamentations 3:22-23 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies [compassion] never come to an end; 23 they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

Take to heart the compassion Jesus has for hungry and thirsty and needy souls.

Second, the patience of Jesus to endure the obtuse disciples, Mark 8:4-5.

I know teachers say there are no stupid questions but the disciples question sure sounds like a genuinely stupid question?

"Where can we possibly get enough bread to feed all these people? Jesus, are you crazy? Can't you look around and see where we are? Where are we going to find any bread, let alone enough bread to feed these thousands?"

Here they are again informing Jesus of basic facts about the bad location, lousy resources, limited ability and opportunity. At the last feeding they complained about the prohibitive cost. Now they complain about the remote location.

Their comments appear sarcastic and disrespectful, no Lord, or Rabbi, or Master. And when Jesus asks them for an inventory, they give a terse, abrupt, one word answer, "Seven."

They think Jesus had lost His mind, when the truth was they were the ones who have lost their minds. Was it really that long ago? What maybe 12 months tops? Why didn't they ask Jesus for bread?

How could the disciples be so dull and slow? How was it possible to forget so great a miracle so quickly? Why didn't they say, "Lord, we have seven loaves. Would you like to multiply them as you did before?"

My first reaction is these guys are idiots, I certainly wouldn't forget something like the feeding of 5000. They my second reaction is if the disciples who were with Jesus were this dull and forgetful, is it possible that I am as well?

This story teaches us the *doctrine of spiritual amnesia*.

I think they should have learned from past experience, but then do I? Is my mind and heart dull and insensitive, do I forget God's blessings and benefits?

We have a crisis, some great need and Jesus meets it. Then some time later we have a similar crisis or need and we are anxious and worried and nervous all over again.

How often do even mature Christians doubt the power of God in their life even when they have past experiences of it? We forget the past when faced with the uncertainties of the future.

Don't we all struggle to some extent with a lack of faith at some level? We are going along OK and then we hit an obstacle, a bump in the road, a nasty challenge and all of a sudden our faith wavers and doubts enter our minds.

We all forget who Jesus is and what He does for His children. We all forget to turn to Jesus and ask for help in difficult or trying or even in hopeless situations. These things come to knock down our self-sufficiency, our independence.

Past grace should make us confident of future grace, yet we find ourselves with weak faith. And Jesus has compassion on even us. This story reminds us of the constant danger of spiritual amnesia. Never forget in the dark what you have seen in the light.

Third, the power of Jesus to satisfy the hungry, Mark 8:6-10.

Jesus not only has compassion for the hungry, Jesus satisfies the hungry.

With Jesus Christ, nothing is impossible. He made the world out of nothing. He can make anything out of nothing. Can you conceive of how impossible that is? No one can make something out of nothing. No scientist, no chemist or physicist. Not even politicians can make

something out of nothing, even though they keep promising to create money and wealth and jobs out of nothing.

Jesus takes seven loaves and a few fish, lifts them to heaven and blesses them, and then hands them to the disciples and while that's going on He keeps creating more bread and fish, enough to feed four thousand people (Matthew says four thousand men, besides women and children).

Nothing is impossible for Jesus. Never doubt the power of Jesus to meet any need and supply every circumstance. No matter what our circumstances, no matter how dismal our hope, or impossible our situation, Jesus lives and Jesus has all power to do all things.

Colossians 1:16-17, 19 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ... 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

If He doesn't exercise His power in a particular circumstance in a particular way we can be absolutely confident it isn't because He can't but because in His perfect wisdom it's not the best thing for us at that moment.

Let us never doubt the providential care of God for all our needs. If He would not spare His own Son on the cross for our needs, what else will He not do for us? If He supplied the needs of some faithless Gentiles in the wilderness, how much more those to love Him and trust in Him.

Jesus' Eternal Satisfaction (they all ate and were satisfied).

This story began with the disciples perhaps sarcastically questioning, "Where in this remote place can anyone find bread enough to satisfy this many people with bread?"

The story ends with the people completely satisfied. Obviously only Jesus can do that.

It wasn't delicacies, it wasn't luxuries, it was barley bread and dried fish. But He perfectly and fully satisfied their need. The gospel tells us they all ate as much as they wanted until they had had their fill.

Jesus knows what we need and if we receive it in faith it will satisfy. Learn as, Paul says, the secret of contentment. Jesus is the all sufficient One. If you have nothing but Jesus, you have enough. If you have everything but Jesus, you still don't have enough.

Philippians 4:19 My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Jesus' Abundant Provision (they took up seven baskets full of broken pieces).

Not only did Christ create out of nothing enough food for as many as ten to twelve thousand people, but He created more than enough, enough for many future needs. Seven loaves and a few fish wouldn't have filled one basket, but the remains fill seven baskets.

And these aren't just any baskets. The Greek word for basket here is the word used to describe the basket used to let the Apostle Paul down over the side of the wall (Acts 9:25). These are man size baskets. This is a difference from the feeding of 5000 miracle, there the baskets were small.

This is a miracle of abundance. We see the generosity of Jesus, always more than enough. We serve a very generous Lord. He withholds nothing good. How should we respond to His generosity and kindness?

Application and conclusion.

Today is World Wide Communion Sunday. In tens of thousands of churches all across the globe this day, Christian congregations are gathering around tables like this to acknowledge the suffering sacrifice of Christ for the sins of the whole world.

This table reflects the outline of our text this morning. The table of our Lord puts on display for us the compassion of Jesus for our needs and the power of Jesus to meet our needs and satisfy our deepest longings out of His abundant and generous riches.

Nothing about Jesus has changed since the day He ascended from earth back into heaven and sat down on the throne at the right hand of the Father. He still has compassion for His children and He still has all power and authority to exercise that power, and when we ask He answers with abundance.

Jesus takes the bread, He blesses it and then breaks it and distributes it. This is Jesus' way with us in the world. He chooses us, calls us, takes us as His own. He blesses us, fills us with His Holy Spirit, with every spiritual blessing. Then He breaks us. We are most useful when we are broken, when we are made dependent on Him, when our self-sufficiency is removed, when we are humbled. Then and only then He sends us out, He distributes us in His world.

This table reflects the generosity of our Lord. Someone might object that the feeding of the 4000 cost Jesus nothing. He didn't sacrifice any hard earned money to buy bread, He just made a bunch without even breaking a sweat. He sacrificed all He had in heaven to come to earth, and of course this was a prelude to His very real and ultimate sacrifice of His life.

The elements here are small, just a taste, of the vast riches of Jesus' compassion and power for us in our forgiveness and salvation. He has withheld nothing from us, He has held back nothing. "All that I am and all that I have are yours" He says. Come, you who are hungry and weary and sin-sick, come and eat bread without cost, drink the cup without price, receive His redemption and be satisfied with the sufficiency of His provision for your every need.

If you see your need and are sincerely repentant and do genuinely humble yourself before God, then come.

Come to the table of our Lord in faith believing that He has the means and the power and the ability and the willingness to forgive your sins and supply your needs.