

**+ Matthew 14:13-21 + The Lord Knows What You Need + 9th Sunday after Pentecost +
+ Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 6 August 2017 +**

How were they going to put food on the table? It was the late 1970s, and the young couple was 300 miles from home while the husband completed his internship. His wife had been a teacher back home, but now she was taking care of their little son. The stipend that the young man received wasn't much even by 1970s standards—barely \$500/month. \$110 of that went to car payments, but student loans needed to be paid and a growing baby needed to be fed. At one point, they were down to \$7 in their checking account, when the young husband did something that shocked his bride. He wrote out a check for \$5 as an offering to the Lord for Sunday.

The young wife couldn't believe what her husband had done. Now there was only \$2 in their checking account! "How will we eat?" she asked him. They had two cans of tomato soup and half a gallon of milk, which were now supposed to last for two weeks until the husband received his next stipend. "Honey, I don't know, but the Lord will provide us with food."

The couple did their best to stretch out the soup and the milk, but that supply of food soon ran out. The young family enjoyed the last of their tomato soup and their milk. There was nothing left in the cupboards or the fridge or the freezer. As the young mother nursed her child, she asked her husband after they had finished the soup and the milk, "What will we have for supper tonight?" The young man responded, "Honey, I don't know, but the Lord will provide." Would the Lord really come through? Would he really provide?

I suppose you could think that the young man was foolish, putting trust and hope in an unseen Provider and encouraging his bride to do the same. That would be the logical way to look at things. After all, his bride did ask a sensible question, "How will we eat?" The young man had to honestly answer, "I don't know, but the Lord will provide." Did Jesus really know what they needed?

As Jesus' disciples stared out at a huge crowd of thousands of people, they saw things pretty logically too. Jesus had just told his disciples to give the crowd something to eat, but you can understand their uncertainty. It was getting late. It was an isolated area far from the local markets. Plus they were a little...short-handed for food. One mother had had the sensibility to send along with her son a lunch of five small loaves of bread and a couple dried fish. A hearty lunch for a boy, but bare crumbs for a crowd. Did Jesus really know what they needed? Would Jesus really provide?

How did Jesus and his disciples find themselves out in that deserted location with so many people? Well, you see, Jesus was at the height of his popularity. Thousands flocked to him from all over to hear him teach about the kingdom of God and see him heal the sick, cast out demons, and even raise the dead, but Jesus was getting tired. To make matters worse, Jesus heard that his cousin, John the Baptizer, had been executed. The Lord needed a break. So Jesus and his disciples got into a boat to cross the Sea of Galilee to a solitary place where they could get away for a little while.

...But that didn't happen. News traveled so fast that, as Jesus made his way across the lake, thousands ran along the shore to meet him on the other side. Some had heard his message or seen his miracles. Most came for selfish reasons. They wanted Jesus to free them from all their physical needs. Some even hoped to make him king, but deep down, they were all **"like sheep without a shepherd."** (Mark 6:34) They were enslaved to guilt, lost in uncertainty and fear, and focused only on this life and nothing else. What they really needed was for Jesus to provide what they actually needed most.

So when Jesus came ashore, what did he do? Did he turn around and sail away? Did he tell everyone, "Go home and leave me alone"? Did he tell them, "Sorry, folks, come back some other time"? I doubt we would've reacted the way Jesus did. **"When he went ashore, he saw a large crowd, had compassion on them, and healed their sick."** Compassionate love welled up inside of him so much that he completely ignored his own physical needs to help those people. He healed their sick, but he did more than that. He knew what they needed—help for body and soul.

It started getting late. Stomachs started grumbling, and they were nowhere near a McDonald's or a market. You can see the disciples starting to get worried. They stared out at a crowd of nearly 10,000 men, women, and kids out in the middle of nowhere. They needed help, so naturally they went to Jesus. **"This place is deserted, and it is already late. Send the crowds away so that they can go into the villages and buy food for themselves."** They thought their response made sense, but they forgot who was listening.

"They don't need to go away,' Jesus told them. 'You give them something to eat.'" "Huh?! You're kidding...right, Lord?" The Apostle John, who was there, tells us that not even eight months' wages could pay

for enough bread for all those people. The disciples looked around and came across that boy with the lunch, but that was all they could find. The cupboards were bare. “How can we possibly feed so many with so little?” They couldn’t feed those people, but Jesus could. He knew how much his disciples needed to trust in him just as he knew how much those people needed food.

So Jesus took matters into his own hands. Jesus had all the people sit down, and then had the disciples bring him the loaves and fish. Taking the bread and fish in his hands, he blessed them, broke the bread, and gave that food to his disciples. Suddenly there was more than enough food for the thousands blanketing the hillside. **“Everyone ate and was satisfied.”** What’s even more remarkable is that Jesus didn’t provide a snack to tide over all those hungry tummies. No, he gave them a feast! In fact, he provided twelve bushel baskets full of leftovers! Jesus knew what every single soul needed and he provided.

At times, we’re like the people in the crowd. In your busy life, you get so hung up on your immediate needs. You fill your prayers with personal requests for God to fill this or that need—“Lord, make me feel better...Lord, give us the money to put good food on the table or to buy that car or that house...Lord, help me with this test...” Now please understand—God wants you to bring all your requests to him, including requests for your physical needs. Yet when those physical needs cause you to forget your greatest need or when they lead you to start thinking that you know what you need better than God does, then it becomes a problem.

Other times, we’re like the disciples. We forget who’s listening to our prayers. Perhaps you’re dealing with a health problem that just won’t go away or a conflict in your family or the recent death of a loved one or money problems. So often in situations like that, you look at the problem and think you’re unable to deal with the challenge. Perhaps you’re asked to serve the Lord in a new way, but you look at yourself and focus on how much you think you lack the gifts you need. Perhaps as a congregation, we’re tempted to focus on how small we are or how limited our resources are when we’re expected to serve an area covering hundreds of miles and thousands of people. We’re tempted to think that the Lord doesn’t know what we need at that moment, and we forget who’s listening.

So how does Jesus respond? Does he see your needs and tell you, “Sorry, come back some other time”? Does he tell you, “That problem, that issue, that challenge is too big for me. That problem, that issue, that challenge is too small for me. I don’t know how to help you with that. You’ll have to fend for yourself”? Does Jesus treat you like automated customer service that forces you to work through countless menus, listen to endless elevator music, and test your patience to the limit before you might possibly perhaps talk to a real human being only to find out that they can’t help you and have to put you on hold for someone else?

No! With the same compassionate love that moved him to heal the sick and proclaim the gospel, Jesus knows your needs and provides for you. He left his heavenly home to become a human being like you. He walked in your footsteps, faced the same temptations, and felt the same needs. He endured suffering and death on a cross, giving up his life so you could have life. He conquered sin and death to make you his own.

That Savior who provided a feast to the hungry from his gracious power is the same God who holds you in his nail-scarred hands. He provides you his strength and wisdom to bear up when faced with life’s trials. Do you ever wonder if your problems or your needs are too big or too small for the Lord? Jesus knows what you need physically and spiritually. He provides what you need most at that difficult time in your life, whether the challenge is great or small. He may not use a miracle, but with his love and power, he always provides.

The same is true for our congregation. Through Word and Sacrament, Jesus changes hearts one soul at a time. For those of us who are impatient, that can be excruciatingly frustrating, but then the Lord provides the patience, the wisdom, and the strength to wait for him and his timing and his blessing. He provides the gifts and abilities needed to carry out the gospel ministry he has entrusted to us at this time in this place. To top it all off, we have a promise guaranteed in the blood of Christ, a promise that fill us with this confidence: **“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** (Romans 8:38-39)

After that difficult conversation with his wife, the young husband gloomily went to check if they had gotten any mail. Mixed with the junk mail was a card from the young man’s aunt. Inside was a check for \$25. The Lord knew what they needed and the Lord provided. Before the family went out grocery shopping, the young wife wrote out another \$5 offering to the Lord. With the rest, they bought food and made it stretch. A week later, the man’s parents concerned that their grandchild wasn’t getting his vitamins sent a check for \$50 and then brought them

enough meat to fill a freezer. In love, the Lord knew what they needed, and with his power, the Lord provided—for both body and soul.

My friends, Jesus knows what you need. You are his beloved children of the King of kings. There's no way he's going to abandon you in your time of need! Jesus meets your needs with the same compassionate love that moved him to meet your greatest need. Jesus meets your needs with almighty power that makes the impossible possible. He knows your physical needs and provides. He knows your spiritual needs and provides. On the cross and in the empty tomb that promise is guaranteed, so we trust in him. Amen.