

## Matthew 14:13-21, et al. + Our God Does Great Things!

Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 13th Sunday after Pentecost + 19 August 2018

What do you need to know before we go? Lisa and I have had to answer that question multiple times in a variety of ways these past few weeks. Whether that's talking to our children, to our neighbors and friends, or to some of you, we've had to determine who needs to know what when as we prepared for the move from our home here in New York to our new home in Florida.

So what do you need to know before we go? What do you need to hear most? This morning the Lord gives us the opportunity to once more look back at the past, to look around us at the present, and to look ahead to the future. In all of that, no matter which direction we look, we will see one thing clearly. **OUR GOD DOES GREAT THINGS!** We give thanks for the great things he has done. We rejoice in the great things he is doing, and we look forward to the great things he will do. To help us do that, we join Jesus by the Sea of Galilee.

The waves lapped gently against the fishing boat as it slid up onto shore. They had come to a deserted place—and that was just fine with Jesus. You see, Jesus was worn out. He was at the height of his popularity with the people. Thousands flocked to him daily to hear him teach about God's Kingdom or to see him heal the sick, cast out demons, or even raise the dead.

To make matters worse, Jesus had recently heard that his cousin, John the Baptizer, had been executed. The Lord needed a break. So Jesus had his disciples cross the lake to a solitary place where they could get away from the crowds, but it didn't last.

News traveled so fast that, as Jesus crossed the lake, thousands poured out of the towns and 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. Some even hoped to make him king, but deep down, they were all ***"like sheep without a shepherd."*** (Matthew 9:36) They were enslaved to guilt, lost in uncertainty and fear, and focused only on this life and nothing else.

As Jesus stepped out of the boat, the crowds surged forward. So what did he do? Did he get back in and sail away? Did he tell them to "Go home!" and "Leave me alone!"? 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."*** So much compassion welled up inside of Jesus that he ignored his own needs to help those people in need. He healed their sick, but he did more than that. He knew what they needed—help for body and soul.

Before long, it was getting late. They were far from any local market. Plus they were short-handed for food. The crowds had rushed out to see Jesus without thinking to bring along anything to eat. One mother, though, had sent 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. The disciples 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."*** A reasonable response, but the disciples forgot that they were speaking to God himself.

***"They don't need to go away,' Jesus told them. 'You give them something to eat.'"*** "What?! You're kidding...right, Lord?" The Apostle John tells us that not even eight months' wages could pay for enough bread for all those people. The disciples came across the boy with the lunch, but that was all they could find. "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 a great thing our God accomplished with so little! The disciples were amazed. The people were satisfied. I mean, there were twelve bushel baskets of leftovers! Yet that was just a glimpse of Christ's power. Our Savior-God has done so much more to not just fill our bellies, but to save us!

It started with a promise to our first parents, who brought sin and death into our world. Over the centuries, the Lord expanded that promise until there was only one person who could fulfill every detail of that promise—our Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus came not to become a bread king, just satisfying everyone's physical needs, but to become our Savior by satisfying our spiritual needs with his forgiveness. Jesus came to live as our holy Substitute

before God. Jesus came to give his life on the cross to pay for all our sins. Jesus came to take that life back up again to open heaven for us.

Our God has been doing great things for us for thousands of years! So how do we respond? We give thanks! We give thanks that God provided a Savior. We give thanks that God has forgiven our sins and has given us eternal life.

Our God has also done great things here! We can give thanks for what our God has done for and through this congregation! Consider this for a moment. In the last 13 years through our congregation, the Lord has brought 40 people into his family through the waters of Holy Baptism. He has led 56 people, youth and adults, to join in fellowship with our congregation, joining us at the Lord's Table and participating in our ministry. He has enabled our congregation to restart our mission here, plant a new congregation in Watertown, and then expand and renovate our former facility. He has enabled our congregation to reach 43 years of grace this year!

Over the years, God has caused little ones to grow in faith and wisdom, caused grown-ups to grow in the grace and knowledge of their Savior, and enabled us to connect neighbors, relatives, friends, and strangers with his saving Word. He has used us to comfort the grieving, rejoice with the celebrating, and encourage the struggling. Why would God do all this? Because he loves us!

Now our God didn't stop doing great things sometime in the past. No, the Lord continues to do great things today and that causes us to rejoice! Before Jesus fed those thousands by the Sea, his disciples couldn't see past the sheer numbers of people and the near total lack of food to feed them. Yet as their gracious God, Jesus provided what they needed—trust in him—even as he provided for the physical needs of all those people.

That Savior who provided a feast to the hungry 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. Jesus knows what you need physically and spiritually. He provides what you need most, whether the challenge is great or small. He may not use a miracle, but in love, he always provides.

The same is true for our congregation. It's tempting to look at the challenges before us and get pessimistic about the future. Yet we have no reason to be pessimistic! Yes, there are challenges, but there are challenges everywhere else. Consider what else the Lord is providing to you right now!

The Lord has placed you in a community and region that desperately needs Jesus. The Lord has provided a beautiful and visible facility that will continue to be a beacon to the community. The Lord has baked "warm and friendly" right into our congregation's DNA. Above all, you have a God who works through his Word, through the waters of Baptism, and through the meal of his Supper to change hearts one soul at a time. You have a God who provides you with the gifts and abilities needed to carry out the gospel ministry he has entrusted to you at this time and this place. Above all, you have a promise from Christ that gives you confidence: **"...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)

With such faith-filled confidence, you can, then, look forward to the great things our God will do. Did you know that when Jesus fed the crowd by the seashore, he was actually hastening his journey to the cross? Many in those crowds didn't see Jesus for who he was. By nature, they were opposed to his true purpose in coming—to save us from sin and death. Jesus was looking forward to that something greater when he fed the thousands by the Sea.

So what great things will our God do in the days ahead? I don't know, but what does our God promise? He promises to watch over our coming and going. He promises to never leave us nor forsake us. He promises to be the unchanging same yesterday and today and forever. He promises to provide his all-sufficient grace when we are weak. He promises to be our refuge and strength. He promises to let nothing separate us from his love.

For 43 years, our God has done great things for his people here, often in ways we've never expected. Why would our Lord suddenly stop now? Trusting in God's promises in his Word, using the gifts God has given us, and seeking the opportunities God provides, surely the Lord will continue to do great things, even with very little as he did with five loaves and two fish by the Sea of Galilee. Ultimately, the greatest thing our God will do is bring us to be with him and the rest of God's family in the eternal glories of heaven.

Our God has done, is doing, and will do great things! What more do you need to know? What more should you expect to hear from your pastor? Dear Family in Christ, thank you for the privilege of being your pastor. Thank

you for allowing me to teach you God's Word, to preach the gospel to you week in and week out, to rejoice and mourn with you, to encourage and admonish and comfort you, to baptize your children and serve you Christ's Supper, to bring the truth of God's Word into your lives and to hold Jesus and the great things he has done before your eyes. You have been our family in Christ. You have rejoiced with us. You have mourned with us. You have encouraged us. In you and through you, we saw the Lord do great things year in and year out these past 13 years, and I look forward to seeing you in heaven someday.

In closing, the words of the Apostle Paul are our prayer for you. ***"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."*** (Philippians 1:3-6) Our God will always do great things for you and through you. Amen.