

Sermon for Pentecost 9

“The Compassionate Eyes and Almighty Hands of Jesus”

Mark 6:30-44

7/22/18b

Introduction

Among the many commercials I used to see as a boy, with their catchy jingles, there were a few commercials of a more serious nature which have stuck in my mind. These commercials were full of images of starving people, mostly in Africa, and mostly children. I recall the skeleton-like bodies, distended stomachs, filthy, fly-infested huts, and the pitiful faces of the people. The commercials were an appeal for help. I felt sorry, in a child’s way, for the people I saw. They didn’t look at all like children were supposed to look. They looked so sad. But, what could I do? Even if I gave my whole allowance for a month, which I wasn’t at all sure I wanted to do, it would be just a drop in the bucket.

Television and our modern media give us eyes to see much more than former generations could ever see. And there is much in what we see that should arouse our compassion. From images of the hungry halfway around the world to cancer patients at the local children’s hospital, we see people in great need. However, even though we may indeed feel compassion, and important as our contributions of money may be, we cannot make these people any better by our own power.

Often you and I may also find *ourselves* in situations of great need in which we cannot help ourselves. When we are confused or hurting we may wonder whether anyone cares and whether anyone can help. Well, dear friends, there *is* someone who not only notices our needs, but who has compassion on us and who is able to help and to bless.

Today’s Gospel lesson shows us the compassion and the power of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. The miracle of Christ’s feeding of the 5,000 shows us

There is nothing Jesus' compassionate eyes see that His almighty hands cannot also bless and relieve.

I. Jesus Sees People's Needs and Has Compassion

One recurring theme in our Gospel lesson is the attention of Jesus to the needs of people. And His compassion for them.

For example, at the beginning of our text the twelve disciples Jesus had recently sent out on their mission had finished that mission and returned. While they were evidently excited and wanted to report to the Lord about all that had happened, Jesus saw that what they really needed was rest—time away from the crush of the crowd, time to simply be with their Lord. Seeing their weariness, Jesus felt compassion for His disciples, and so He said, “Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while” (6:31). So they got in the boat with Jesus and sailed away.

Later on that day Jesus and the disciples encountered more crowds. That's the way it was when Jesus was around. And here again, when He saw the crowds, Jesus also perceived their true and deepest need. Mark tells us that Jesus saw that they were “like sheep not having a shepherd” (6:34). Like all of us, they needed the perfect direction and protection, care and provision which comes from God alone. Jesus felt deep compassion for the people. And so, even though the plan had been for a quiet retreat with His disciples, Jesus drew near to the crowds and “began to teach them many things” (6:34). To sow in their hearts the seed of His Word.

So we see in our text how Jesus saw all these people's needs—His disciples' needs, the needs of each one of those countless faces in the crowd—and Jesus truly had compassion on them.

We have needs, too, don't we? I'm sure the list comes to your mind pretty quickly of what your needs are. It's what you think about when you wake up every morning, and maybe even through the sleepless

hours of some nights. Be assured, beloved, that Jesus sees those needs and feels compassion. But look beyond those needs for just a moment. Because you and I have needs that go deeper than even we ourselves know. The Holy Spirit, through the Word, reveals to us that beyond our wish lists of good health, happiness, financial security, and family peace, we have much deeper and more serious needs. Being descendants of Adam and Eve, we are born with original sin. Consequently, there is nothing in our sinful flesh that is not by nature corrupted and broken. Our desires are twisted, our will is perverted toward all that is evil. We do not by nature know God nor can we come to Him. We do not, by nature, truly care about our neighbor's needs, unless there's some benefit in it for us. Self-centered and self-absorbed, we are, by nature, deserving of wrath; we are lost and condemned persons. To have help and relief from *that* terrible predicament is our true and greatest need.

But does anyone see our need, and does anyone care? This morning Jesus reminds us that He indeed sees all human needs—also our needs, even our deepest need to be rescued from all the brokenness and ugliness that sin has brought. And Jesus our Lord cares. He feels for us. He feels compassion both about the material needs that beset us, and about the deeper spiritual needs as well.

II. Jesus, Our Gracious Lord, Has Power to Bless and Relieve

Moreover, our Lord Jesus has almighty power to help. He is able to come to us in the midst of our most desperate need, and to bless, forgive, and relieve us. Jesus, the Lord, can go farther than just seeing the need and “feeling for us,” Jesus has power to deliver and to save us.

How clearly our text shows that! The feeding of the 5,000 with nothing more than five loaves and two fish. What a revelation this is of the grace and power of Jesus, God's Son! After teaching the crowds the very words of God, Jesus proceeded to do something for their bodies that no human being could do. Most any host or hostess can feed a houseful of guests—provided sufficient food has been prepared. But what can even Martha Stewart herself do when thousands show up for

dinner and the refrigerator is about empty? What can a poor, rural village in Africa do when the wheat harvest fails three years running, and there is nothing to eat except the meager produce of one family's backyard garden?

That was essentially the situation Jesus encountered in our text. Jesus was teaching that huge gathering of people *out in the middle of nowhere*, but as far as the disciples could tell, no provision at all had been made to feed them. As the hour grew late, the only solution to this food problem, as far as Jesus' disciples were concerned, was to send the crowds on their way quickly, so everyone could go and buy themselves supper. But the Lord Jesus viewed the possible solutions to this problem quite differently. He indeed saw the need, just as His disciples had: the need was hunger. Jesus indeed had compassion, as the disciples also did, in their own imperfect way, as they looked at the faces of the people. But Jesus went a step further by acting in a way that only the Creator could act, in doing what only God could do. Jesus used this occasion, where human power and human possibilities were at their end, to manifest the divine power that belongs to Him by nature. God's Son used this occasion to demonstrate the might that lies in His creative hands. With five loaves and two fish in those hands, Jesus looked up to heaven, thanked His Father, from whom all good things come, and then, in a way that human minds will never understand, Jesus blessed the food and then fed *and satisfied* 5,000 men *not to mention wives and children* with an abundance of bread and fish, as much as they desired, such that there were even leftovers, twelve baskets full.

[*Pause*] Do you not know? Have you not heard? This Lord Jesus Christ is *our* God, present with us still today. He wondrously provides for His people in all their time of distress. In your need which His compassionate eyes so clearly see, Jesus has boundless power to bless and relieve.

This applies first to our bodily needs. How important it is for us at all times to recognize the Lord as the supplier of our "daily bread." How necessary to realize the ultimate source of all that we have—to realize

that everything from food and drink to house and home to peace and health to a good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like *all comes from our gracious God*. You know, so often you and I assess our lives and measure our possessions and needs and come to the false conclusion that much is missing. We add it all up and see a negative sign in the ledger. I don't have this and I don't have that. But it is much truer to the facts to confess that the ledger of God's people always shows a plus sign...that God supplies us quite well—indeed, richly—from day to day. When was the last time you had a garage sale? In general, people have such sales because we have more material things than we need. This morning the area hospitals and emergency rooms are, no doubt, full, but where are you? We are all here, enjoying the health necessary to sit in church. Many children, even in our own nation, will go to bed hungry tonight. But your children will not. And why? Because we are so good and pious and strong and wise? No, all this is only because of the fatherly, divine goodness and mercy of our God, without any merit or worthiness in us. Truly the Lord has given us and our families not only what we need, but more besides. As in our text, with the twelve baskets at the end of the meal, after God supplies our needs, there are even leftovers.

And besides our bodily needs, our gracious God provides also for our spiritual needs. That spiritual brokenness that God saw as Adam and Eve hid from Him in the Garden, that brokenness moved God's heart to pity. The onset of ugly self-centeredness, which began in the first couple the very moment the fruit was eaten, and has continued in all of us to this day, that sickness of selfishness prompted our merciful God to act for our renewal, our revival. The helplessness of sinners, including each and every one of us, to comply with the perfect Law of God, our God saw that, and He felt compassion. So God the Son took on human flesh and was born of Mary to reconcile us to the Father. Dear friends, just like the feeding of the 5,000 was an impossible situation for human strength, so also the situation of sinners trying to satisfy the demands of a holy God is impossible relying on our human strength. I have failed and so have you. My love for God, not enough! Our love and compassion for our neighbors, not enough! Therefore God Himself did

the necessary work in the person of His perfect Son. Jesus obeyed the whole Law of God in our stead, and then, out of His compassion, Jesus suffered condemnation in humanity's place once and for all. Jesus' death on the cross, you see, is not merely something that assists us in earning eternal life, His death on the cross *actually completely won for us* eternal life. Christ rose from the dead to proclaim a task finished, a mission accomplished. He sent His apostles to spread the Good News that peace was now secured, that the work had been completed and the gift of eternal life was now *freely offered*. The Word of God, the Gospel preached, still conveys that offer, still conveys that gift. And your faith, which is itself the gift of God, receives what Jesus has already won for you.

All this means, to borrow words from last Sunday's Epistle lesson, that "[you have been] blessed...in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:3).

III. Main Point Reiterated: There is nothing Jesus' compassionate eyes see that His almighty hands cannot also bless and relieve.

Dear friends in Christ, the feeding of the 5,000 was a great miracle. And it's a reminder to us of what Jesus can do. It is a reminder of the fact that Jesus came into this world to bless and to relieve us in our need—ultimately through the forgiving sacrifice of His own body and blood on the cross. Behind it all lies divine grace, the compassionate heart of Jesus.

Today's Gospel lesson teaches us a very important point, that **there is nothing Jesus' compassionate eyes see that His almighty hands cannot also bless and relieve.**

Apply that in a concrete way to the needs in your life:

If you are trying to cope with an unexpected hardship that's landed in your life, say, the realization that your retirement years are not going to

be what you had thought, that they are not going to be near as comfortable, healthy, or full of leisure as you had hoped, well, in the midst of that, Jesus is able to bless and support you. The Lord knows all our disappointments and feels compassion. And, even when all looks bleak to us, He is still able—and He has promised—to open His hand and supply us with everything we need to support our body and life (cf. today's Introit, from Ps. 145:16). The Spirit of Christ is also able to work a change in your heart...in your views and in your values so that you come to see that perfect health and wealth and pleasure are not the most important things in life...are not nearly such blessed things as relying on God's mercy and serving your neighbor in *his or her* need. What the world would see as a bad situation Jesus is more than able to transform into a source of good for you and for others. Indeed, Jesus is able and He will do it. The reason is that He loves you and has compassion.

Or, if you experience a painful loss in your life, say, the death of a child, here again is Jesus, who fed the 5,000, and who loves you. His compassionate eyes see every grieving heart, and He is able to soothe the hurt and the pain of those who trust in Him. Jesus will not leave the grieving all alone but will bless you and relieve you in ways that you cannot even imagine. Our Lord is able to do that. For even death, as the world found out on Easter morning, is not stronger than Jesus. Death's dominion has been removed, and it was removed by Jesus. Jesus died for all, to rescue us from eternal death, and then our Savior rose to life again. No one else did that, only Jesus. That means that in Jesus we have a living Savior, a Savior who has triumphed in the greatest fight. So, in the midst of the death that brings a temporary grief to our hearts, Jesus is present. He is there to strengthen our faith and our hope in the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come—a life that is with Him, a life that never ends, a life reunited with all the saints who have gone before us.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, whatever may be happening to you now or tomorrow, take heart in what God, out of divine compassion, has done for you in Christ, His Son. And take heart that your almighty Lord Jesus

Christ lives to watch over you, and to bless, to forgive, and to relieve you in all your time of need. Take heart, for indeed **there is nothing Jesus' compassionate eyes see that His almighty hands cannot also bless and relieve.**

Amen.