

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Quincy, IL  
Rev. Martin Eden

Pentecost 10  
Saturday, August 5, 2023, at 5:00 p.m.  
Sunday, August 6, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.

# **“You Give Them Something to Eat”**

Matthew 14:13-21

In all three readings today, we hear of how God and the people of God deal with those outside of the Kingdom of God. Matthew records that Jesus had compassion on the crowds. They had followed Him out into the wilderness without really knowing who Jesus was. In the account of this event recorded in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus describes the crowd as being like “sheep without a shepherd.”

There are so many in our society, and perhaps within your own family; within your circle of friends; among your neighbors, co-workers, teammates – there are so many who fit into this category. They seem to want to know God; maybe they talk about God as if they perhaps do know Him; but, in reality, they are just wandering around in a wilderness with no real idea what to do.

Jesus greeted His crowd with compassion, and He told His disciples, “You give them something to eat.” The “crowd” in your life is to be greeted with compassion and, as His disciples, Jesus says to you, “You give them something to eat.”

This compassion that God’s people are to have for those who are lost in the wilderness of this world is best summed up in Paul’s response to the unfaithful Jews, which we heard in our Epistle reading from his letter to the Romans. Paul’s compassion for them is such that he even says that he wishes that he was

cursed, cut off from Christ, and destined for Hell if that would mean his Israelite kinsmen would receive the joy of Christ and the inheritance which was intended for them – an inheritance from which they have wandered away.

It is an amazing insight into the love and compassion of Paul. Most Christians hesitate to speak to someone about Christ because they are afraid the conversation might get uncomfortable. Our world has foolishly bought into the old adage that the two subjects you need to stay away from are “religion or politics.” Really? Politics, as a word, literally means “that which has to do with what goes on in your city” (the Greek word for city is “polis”). Religion has to do with your relationship with God and whether or not the “eternal city” is in your future.

When you ponder topics worthy of serious discussion, the wellbeing of your city and the wellbeing of your soul should be at the top of your list (and not in that order). I hear the objections, “But pastor, those conversations get uncomfortable and sometimes downright hostile.” Therein lies the problem. The problem is not discussion of what is best for your city or your soul. The problem is your hostility and inability to show compassion to someone who holds a different view. In regard to politics, most of what I see (and I’m talking about people I know); most of what I see are snarky memes which push people farther away from each other. Real conversation works much better than tribalism. Compassion and understanding need to be the starting point.

Setting politics aside, when that “double-edged sword” of the Word of God begins to penetrate, it does get uncomfortable. Paul says he would endure an eternity in Hell if his words would be heard and received by the Israelites whom he loves. That is a little bit more than an “uncomfortable conversation.” Moses made a similar statement in regard to the Israelites in the midst of the

Golden Calf incident. He was willing to have his name blotted out of the Book of Life if that is what it took for all of Israel to be saved.

What are you willing to do? What are you prepared to say to them? What are you willing to give so that your friends and family hear and receive the joy of Christ and the inheritance from which they have wandered away? The bad news is that you can't take the Holy Spirit and shove Him down their throat "feathers and all" – as Luther famously said. (Oh that we could!)

The question is, in what specific way do you show compassion for them? Real compassion always comes with a cost. You cannot show actual compassion without being inconvenienced or made to be uncomfortable. Compassion is not simply a feeling.

We see the work of our Lord being done throughout the world. As we hear from the prophet Isaiah – the Divine community of believers calls to nations that do not know the Lord – and among those nations, there are some who will "run" to the Lord. And for this we are thankful. Yet, far too many of them remain wandering in the wilderness.

On all of those near and far, on all of those who are not blessed to know the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the worship, and the promises of God – on all of these people, we are to have and show compassion.

The Divine community of believers follows the pattern set by the Good Shepherd. We do not drive or push people to Christ, but rather we draw them and lead them as the shepherd leads his sheep and as Christ repeatedly called, "Come, follow Me." Isaiah says, "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters."

Jesus' disciples shared the fruits of Christ's compassion and witnessed how they all ate and were satisfied. We partake of the fruits of Christ's compassion.

We eat and drink and are satisfied.

And being here, rejoicing with the other forgiven children of God is a wonderful thing. The compassion, the pouring out of mercy that we have experienced and continue to experience should not only create joy, comfort, and thankfulness for our relationship with God, but also the “great sorrow and unceasing anguish” that Paul felt for those who do not know the joy and comfort that we know.

The challenge for us is to figure out how to best express Christ’s compassion to a world that is simultaneously unsympathetic and falsely compassionate. Our world simultaneously mocks God and feels no remorse for sin while it defends and protects all sorts of sinful activity – and calls the defense of that sin “compassion.”

As much as we would like, you cannot push these people out of their wilderness to Christ. They must be led, and they must be shown what real compassion is. We do not make excuses for sin, but we point to Christ who carried our sin. The gentleness and forgiveness which we have joyously received from God must be seen in the people of God and must be heard in our words.

The emptiness of a life without Christ can only be filled with Christ – and the food which He offers. His Word which Scripture says will never return empty; His flesh which is real food and His blood which is real drink fills us. You are here this day receiving the fruits of Christ’s compassion because someone in your life did not want you to wander aimlessly and starve in the proverbial wilderness of sin, and they followed through on Jesus’ command when He said, “You give them something to eat.” Amen.