Matthew 14:13-21 When Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place to be alone. When the crowds heard this, they followed him on foot from the towns. 14When Jesus got out of the boat, he saw a large crowd. He had compassion on them and healed their sick. 15When evening came, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place and the hour is already late. Send the crowds away, so that they can go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” 16But Jesus said to them, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.” 17They told him, “We have here only five loaves and two fish.” 18“Bring them here to me,” he replied. 19Then he instructed the people to sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves and the two fish. After looking up to heaven, he blessed them. He broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples. The disciples gave the food to the people. 20They all ate and were filled. They picked up twelve basketfuls of what was left over from the broken pieces. 21Those who ate were about five thousand men, not even counting women and children.

I have to tell you that this history of Jesus always fills me with intrigue and wonder. The reason for that is that this is one of the few histories of Jesus that is actually recorded in all four Gospels. In case you are wondering I did a quick search and here are the stories found in all four Gospels: John the Baptist’s ministry, John baptizes Jesus, Jesus’ calling of the first four disciples, The feeding of the five thousand, the Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem, the plot to kill Jesus, and then most of the things connected to the Passion of Jesus and resurrection. Considering all that Jesus did, all of that is really not that much in his history. Things are found in all the gospels because everyone thought that those events are the shakers and movers in the life of Jesus. So what took place here in our text, maybe in why it took place and what happened afterward is an absolutely important lesson. And in truth, there are lots of lessons to be found in this particular history. Let’s go ahead and just jump into our text under the theme: THOUGHTS ON JESUS.

The first thing to notice is that this event occurs because Jesus and his disciples are seeking some time alone, needed time alone. The disciples are returning from their first outing as preachers of Jesus and they are returning because the news has come that John the Baptist has been murdered by Herod. They wanted to speak of their adventures as preachers and they wanted to mourn the death of John. Yet as they go to a northern section of the Sea of Galilee the people figure out where they are going and get there almost as soon as Jesus and the disciples.

Yet Jesus doesn’t disparage the crowds. He grasps why they have come. He understands they are sheep without a shepherd. Jesus sets aside his needs and he ministers to this great group. Jesus wants to take care of them. Jesus wants to shepherd them.

Please note this about Jesus. He is the same way with you and me. He knows our needs and our wants, he knows what is best for us and he takes care of us for our best just as he does for the people before him. I think that something to note. Our text says, “He had compassion on them.” Now get this, Jesus has compassion on them knowing as the Son of God what is going to happen in the next day. Let me just remind you of what will be.

Following the feeding of the 5,000 men, Jesus knowing that the people “want to make him King” quickly dismisses the disciples, sends them back across the lake on the boat and he goes off to pray by himself. Later that morning Jesus will walk on the water and later the next day the crowds will once again find Jesus. That’s when Jesus speaks to them of being “The bread from heaven, the bread of life that they need and that they are to eat.” The people don’t like this teaching and here is what is recorded. When they heard it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching! Who can listen to it?” But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, asked them, “Does this cause you to stumble in your faith?...The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.” …After this, many of his disciples turned back and were not walking with him anymore.”

Jesus has compassion on them knowing they will all walk away from him. This whole event is a turning point in the ministry of Jesus. I mentioned before that this becomes the “year of opposition” the fact that people begin to stay away from Jesus and yes, even begin to side with the religious rulers of the day. This is the event that sets up the fact that the people will be shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” The fact that our text and all the others directs our attention to the compassion and care of Jesus for these people is so important. And again, this is exactly how Jesus will deal with us…total care and compassion.

So we are told that Jesus will begin teaching and healing the people before him. But if you read all of the accounts you will learn that one of the first things Jesus does is challenge the disciples to think about how this large group of people can be fed. Be aware of that. This feeding is not some sort of spur of the moment thing. From the moment they arrived and saw the crowds Jesus knew what he was going to do and he wants the disciples to contemplate what could be. It is the disciples who come up with things like: it would take 200 days wages to give just a morsel to such a crowd. It is the disciples who conclude later on that the best thing to do is send them away so they can maybe buy their own food.

I have to tell you how deeply that answer and attitude of the disciples distresses me. As I just told you this miracle is going to occur at the beginning of the third year of Jesus’ ministry and really this miracle and the things that follow are going to begin what is called “the year of opposition.” Yep, people will start opposing Jesus and no longer following Jesus because they don’t like what he says. Understand this, the disciples are with Jesus for two years now, two years of miracles and wonders, two years of hearing his words and wisdom. They have already confessed that they believe Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God. So why don’t they act like it? Jesus challenges them to put their trust and confidence in Him. He asks them how they are going to feed this group right from the start. Don’t you think someone, one of these fine disciples could have come up with a, “Jesus, we can’t feed them, but you can, you are the Lord! Tell us what to do!” Nope, they come up with, “Send them away!”

What they have done is the exact opposite of faith. But be careful, because I think each and every one of us in our lives have behaved in exactly the same way. God promises that all things will serve for our good. God promises to always be with us and watch over us. God promises there is nothing to fear, not now, not ever, and yet, how many times haven’t we acted like we don’t even know Jesus? We act like we have never heard of his power and might, his love and goodness, his care and compassion for us! Instead of trusting in Him totally as we face trial and tribulation, we blame, we accuse, we want to argue he doesn’t know what he is doing. All too often we are just like the disciples who miss the total fact that God’s Son loves us, cares for us and is always with us. That is what faith is about! I would encourage that we not have the kind of faith the disciples display today! Simply, absolutely trust in Jesus!

I don’t know how Jesus does this miracle, but it is clear that he takes five loaves of bread and two fish and multiplies it to feed well over 5,000 people. Remember 5,000 was the number of just the men in the crowd. What I can tell you is that I think everyone realized the miracle was happening. I think that happened in a couple of ways. First, the disciples tell everyone that it is happening. I can just hear them, as they are passing out bread and fish, saying to people: “All we had was five loaves and two fish and yet Jesus keeps giving us more and more!” At the same time, people are watching the group of disciples going back and forth to Jesus and bringing out more and more food when there isn’t a source of food to be seen. (Grasp that, there is no big box of bread and fish sitting there. Yet the disciples keep going to Jesus walking away with more!) Yep, I think everyone was able to see and be a part of the awe that must have filled this crowd as they grasped what was going on. Free bread and fish from Jesus. Miraculous bread and fish!

Think on this. I think this is obvious, but I have never heard anyone speak of this. You don’t get to eat the bread, to be a part of this wonder, to get the thrill of the miracle unless you are there! What a simple fact. Not a single person who skipped out got a thing. Not a single person who decided this was too far to go for Jesus found any blessing at all. Either you were there and were a part or you were not there and you totally missed out.

This is still, in many ways, the way Jesus works. You need to come to him. You need to seek him out, to be looking for his marvel and wonder. At the very least, you need to be sure and be exposed to the Gospel message of Jesus on a regular basis. For those of you who constantly turn your back on gatherings where Jesus is present, do you grasp how much you have missed? That sermon that could have addressed your doubt, you missed its power for you. The words of the pastor that would have taken your drooping heart and caused it to soar with the joy of Jesus, you didn’t get that. The balm of God’s Word, either in the readings we had or the songs we sang, that balm that would have soothed and medicated your wounded soul, you missed that! And I am going to guess that should someone try to encourage you to make Church and God’s Word a part of your life, you will dismiss them with a “Yeah, there’s nothing there for me!” Only it’s not that there was nothing for you it’s the fact that you weren’t there to get fed, to be soothed, to experience the care and love of Jesus. You miss out on the wonder and marvel of Jesus by not being with him. Think on that. Is that what you want?

Because I am going to tell you that Jesus is awesome and wonderful. He pours out his grace and mercy every day for his children. He gave freely to these people and He gives freely to you. He offers you his love, his very life that your sins be paid for. He offers you victory and joy in the certainty and sureness of eternal life through His redemptive work. Honestly, the ups and downs of life, the trials and temptations that beset us, the struggles we go through are made easier, bearable, survivable and victorious in Jesus.

And that is just the beginning of the wonder of Jesus. The bread he fed those people is symbolic of the bread of life that Jesus truly and wonderfully is. He is the one who gives us life and salvation. No, not because we deserve it, but because in his grace and mercy he give it. He has given his Word, the wisdom of God for the saving of our souls. He has given up his exalted position of glory and honor in heaven to come and die on the cross for us, to give his all that this precious gift of eternal life and salvation could be ours. If you caught it, our Old Testament reading from Isaiah was all about the eternal banquet with wine and milk and bread all without cost because of God’s love.

And yes, Jesus gave his life. This is still something that completely fills me with awe. God’s Son Jesus came to be the atoning sacrifice for my sins, indeed for the sins of the whole world, that everyone and anyone who believes in Jesus can get this free and certain gift of his. Because he took my life to the cross and gives me his life. He took your life to the cross and gives you his life! His holy, pure, righteous and eternal life, that God’s kingdom, God’s gracious promises of heaven are surely and truly ours.

All because Jesus is the true Bread of Heaven. He is the source of life and salvation. He feeds my soul and your with his precious love, his undaunting and gracious care. I am always saddened when there are so many in this world who flee and pass by the diner of Jesus for their souls. (Ever think of your church in that way? It is the diner of Jesus, that quaint, comfy place where God supplies us with eternal and heavenly food!) Jesus is the Word. He is the clear and precise revelation of all that the Father would have us know and believe. His Word is not filled with demands and “you’d betters” but rather Jesus simply puts forth the fact that to believe in Him is to have eternal life and salvation free and certain because He is the Savior, my Savior, your Savior.

My dear souls, Jesus truly fills our need. This miracle gives us a glimpse again, of his power and majesty and how Jesus is willing to supply what we need. He especially came to supply the bread of life and the living water of His Word that we might be his children and heirs of eternal life. Thank you Father, for this gift of Jesus. Thank you Jesus for your compassion and grace and granting us all that we need for eternal life. Amen.