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Peace, Sun Prairie  
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Pentecost 11

Matthew 14:13-21

**TRUSTING GOD TO PROVIDE OUR PHYSICAL  
NECESSITIES IS A SPIRITUAL MATTER**

The account of Jesus feeding the 5000 stands out because it is written about in all four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Not even the birth of Christ is written about in all four Gospels! If you've been a Christian for any length of time it is likely you are familiar with this event. On the basis of this story, you've probably been encouraged, and rightly so, how God provides for our physical needs. But God's care for a believer is never either a physical or spiritual thing, it is always a spiritual thing. Our faith in God even for physical care has for us an eternal perspective. Thus Our faith in His care may be either strong or weak. Therefore today let's focus our attention on this truth: Trusting God to provide our physical necessities is a spiritual matter.

Matthew makes it seem as though the disciples presented Jesus with this big problem. Consider the logistics of feeding more than 5000 people away from civilization. We know from the Gospel of John that it was not the disciples who presented the problem to Jesus. It was Jesus who presented the problem to the disciples -earlier that day. Jesus put that out there -how are we going to feed this crowd? -and then let it simmer in their minds for the rest of the day while He busied Himself among the people. What would they come up with? How resourceful could they be? The pressure was on. It could end up being sort of embarrassing if the people would be looking to them for help. After all, weren't they partly the reason the people were out there? Or worse, it could get dicey if the crowd grew hungry and impatient.

Maybe you've not been responsible to feed 5000 people. But you are responsible for something. How are we going to afford school clothes this year? Tuition? Paying the employees? People are depending on me. How will I have the energy to do everything that's expected of me? What if my health doesn't hold out? What will happen if I'm not able to drive or if it gets too hard for me to live in my house anymore?

Matthew tells us, *As evening approached, the disciples came to [Jesus] and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already after supper. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.* Interesting: we'll throw it back on the people to fend for themselves and send them safely away from us.

But notice what else their words suggest: This is a remote place and it's already after supper. Perhaps in His busyness Jesus had absent-mindedly forgotten all about the food problem. After all, hadn't He delegated the matter to them? So maybe Jesus hadn't given it another thought. Now they have to interrupt Him and remind Him about it and point out how late it's getting.

Stop and think about that. Here is Jesus engrossed in His work of teaching and healing the sick. Healing the sick. Caring for their physical needs. And did the disciples think perhaps Jesus forgot the people needed to eat? A little hint: the Son God doesn't forget anything. Everything He does, even acting as though He were absentminded, He does on purpose.

Jesus wouldn't permit them to pass the problem off. They hadn't learned their lesson. Matthew 14 goes on: *Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give*

*them something to eat.” We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered. “Bring them here to me,” he said.* Jesus may have said those words in a polite way. But I wonder if His voice might have had a little edge: Tsk! Bring them here to me! Matthew 14 continues: *Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves.* Jesus, always the Teacher, did something He didn't need to do. He looked up to heaven and gave thanks. He could have fed the 5000 without doing that. He is God after all. Giving thanks didn't benefit His Father or Himself in any way. Why did He look up to heaven and give thanks? Do you think perhaps His disciples might have learned anything as they watched Him?

Then to punctuate the lesson, after they had finished playing the part of a wait staff and everyone else had eaten their fill, the disciples collected how many baskets of leftover food? Twelve baskets? For how many disciples? You see, the disciples still needed to eat supper too! They didn't see it coming, but Jesus had provided even for them.

It's a spiritual matter, not just physical. What moved Jesus to care for the disciples' needs personally is the

same thing that drove Him to start teaching the crowd about the Kingdom of heaven and healing their sick as soon as He saw them approaching. Matthew 14 says, *When Jesus... saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them.* That word “compassion” is special in the original New Testament Greek language. In a sense, it means Jesus’ stomach was tied up in knots. From deep in His guts, from the depths of His innermost being, He felt compassion. Compassion compelled Him to meet the needs of the crowd. Both with divine words and miracles. And while He was taking care of this small mass of humanity, the King of love was simultaneously concerning Himself with the disciples. His compassion for the world and His personal care for these men is what would drive Him on to Gethsemane, and then before Pontius Pilate and then the Golgotha. The Bible says, *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

Thus, when we have physical, earthly worries, it is, at the same time, a spiritual crisis for us believers. Sometimes we fall into the mindset, “I know my sins are paid for and Jesus has won heaven for me. That’s all good. But what about this situation I’m in right now?” - whatever it may be -when we’re desperate, aching,

despairing, exhausted, alone, grieving, sick, when we feel vulnerable and unsafe, like there is no net for us, no protection -when we're so uncertain about tomorrow - the things that wake us up at 3:00 in the morning so that we cannot fall back to sleep -it could be something as basic as the rent or as daunting as class expectations for the semester or as complex as marriage/family issues or as heavy as the pressures of work.

Then ask yourself, "Do I believe the things I sang about in the Glory Be to God on High this morning? Do I believe that Jesus ascended to God's right hand and that He has authority over all things? Do I believe that Jesus rose from the dead and in so doing conquered death and hell and the devil all for me? Do I believe that He died on the cross to atone for all my sins and therefore God the Father is completely at peace with me and has nothing but good intentions toward me -that, ultimately, He wants to save me in every way?" If God, in the person of Christ, has done all that for me, why am I balking at these other earthly matters? Is He really going to go to all that trouble, all the toil and labor of saving my soul for eternity -only then to be absent-minded about my life and my needs in the meantime? He was able to feed more than 5000 people at once and at the same time didn't forget the needs of the disciples.

Yet why does He always keep me on the edge of desperation, always needy, never comfortable -why does His help always seem to come a day late and a dollar short? Could it be that it's *not* because God hates you or has forgotten about you, but because He loves you and wants to keep you always turning to Him, always near Him? Could it be that this is how God keeps gathering you to Himself?

Do you believe that God has good intentions toward you? You most definitely may. He called you by name in your baptism and in that Sacrament gave you Jesus and everything that belongs to Jesus. And in the Lord's Supper Jesus, the Champion over all things, comes from heaven and gives you Himself, body and blood. You may be confident, yes, even cheerful, in the face of suffering, deprivation, hardship, conflict, vulnerability and even guilt. You don't even need to know what tomorrow holds. You only need to know that God has good intentions toward you and intends to save you in every way. Jesus earned it by His death and sealed it by His resurrection.

One final point. Call this the epilogue. It's worth noting that Jesus didn't create a big pile of food and then tell

His disciples to go feed the crowd. They acted on faith. They took the little food and then distributed it as He told them. It's also worth noting, that aside from the twelve baskets of leftovers, Jesus didn't create a giant stash of food for the people to take home either. He gave them what they needed for right then. And so the Bible says, *Your strength shall equal your days.*