

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

August 2, 2020

Psalms 136:1-9, 23-26 (NIV) ¹Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. *His love endures forever.* ²Give thanks to the God of gods. *His love endures forever.* ³Give thanks to the Lord of lords: *His love endures forever.* ⁴to him who alone does great wonders, *His love endures forever.* ⁵who by his understanding made the heavens, *His love endures forever.* ⁶who spread out the earth upon the waters, *His love endures forever.* ⁷who made the great lights— *His love endures forever.* ⁸the sun to govern the day, *His love endures forever.* ⁹the moon and stars to govern the night; *His love endures forever.* . . . ²³to the One who remembered us in our low estate *His love endures forever.* ²⁴and freed us from our enemies, *His love endures forever.* ²⁵and who gives food to every creature. *His love endures forever.* ²⁶Give thanks to the God of heaven. *His love endures forever.*

Isaiah 55:1-5 (NIV) ¹"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. ²Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. ³Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. ⁴See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples. ⁵Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor."

Romans 9:1-5 (6-13) (NIV) ¹I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit—²I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, ⁴the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption

as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. ⁵Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen. ⁶It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. ⁷Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ⁸In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. ⁹For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son." ¹⁰Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. ¹¹Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹²not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." ¹³Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Matthew 14:13-21 (NIV) ¹³When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. ¹⁵As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." ¹⁶Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." ¹⁷"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. ¹⁸"Bring them here to me," he said. ¹⁹And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

The Compassion of the Kingdom

Matthew 14:13-21

❑ **The emotions of Jesus** (verses 13-15)

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❑ **Little is much when offered with thanksgiving to God** (verses 17-19; John 6:8-9; Psalm 103:13-14; Philippians 4:19; Philippians 4:6)

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❑ **God will satisfy our needs** (verses 20-21; Isaiah 55:1-2; Psalm 34:8; Jeremiah 31:14; Psalm 36:7-8; Matthew 6:31-33; John 6:35)

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The Compassion of the Kingdom

Matthew 14:13-21

Leslie Wagner from Peel, Arkansas shares in Reader's Digest about a time when the supermarket clerk had just tallied up her groceries: "I was \$12 over what I had on me. I began to remove items from the bags, when another shopper handed me a \$20 bill. "Please don't put yourself out," I told him. "Let me tell you a story," he said. "My mother is in the hospital with cancer. I visit her every day and bring her flowers. I went this morning, and she got mad at me for spending my money on more flowers. She demanded that I do something else with that money. So, here, please accept this. It is my mother's flowers."

Such acts of kindness pull on our heartstrings because we were made in the image of the God who, the Bible says, is *full of compassion* (Psalm 116:5).

These messages from the Gospel of Matthew have the theme: *The Good News of the Kingdom*. Today we look at ***The Compassion of the Kingdom***. As we delve into this passage of Scripture, let's look first at:

The emotions of Jesus (verses 13-15)

Our gospel text today begins:

¹³When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.

That should leave us wondering, what happened? What had Jesus heard that he would want to go off *privately to a solitary place*?

What happened was that King Herod, the son of Herod the Great, who had imprisoned John the Baptist, had executed him for all the worst reasons imaginable.

We are then told in Matthew 14:12 *John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.* (NIV)

We might suppose that Jesus withdrew *privately* [by himself] *to a solitary place* because Jesus was grieving the loss of this Godly prophet, his own relative, of whom Jesus had said *Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist* (Matthew 11:11).

John's death was a poignant reminder that Jesus had come *to give His life a ransom for many*.

Jesus may have sought solitude to be in the presence of his heavenly Father in order to gain strength and resolve for the tumultuous year that lay ahead of him, where he would face mounting opposition and then rejection, suffering and death.

We cannot know what Jesus was feeling because we are not told in Scripture; most likely, because Jesus did not disclose those thoughts and feelings to His disciples.

But the Bible is not silent on the emotions of Jesus.

An article by G. Walter Hansen in Christianity Today begins in this way:

“The gospel writers paint their portraits of Jesus using a kaleidoscope of brilliant "emotional" colors. Jesus felt *compassion*; he was *angry, indignant, and consumed with zeal*; he was *troubled, greatly distressed, very sorrowful . . . deeply moved, and grieved*; he *sighed*; he *wept and sobbed*; he *groaned*; he was *in agony*; he was *surprised and amazed*; he *rejoiced very greatly* and was *full of joy*; he *greatly desired*, and he *loved*.”

Our gospel lesson reveals to us the first among these many emotions:

¹³When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

The emotion that moved Jesus more often than any other recorded in Scripture is compassion.

Dr. Thaddeus Williams of the Talbot School of Theology tell us that the Greek word for compassion, meant a yearning or churning in your gut. Dr. Williams tells us: “The first century Jew often located the deepest physical core of our emotions down in the gut.” Anyone who has ever felt the abdominal churning of extreme anxiety or that flipflopping of your stomach due to a feelings of love or excitement or extreme joy can understand why.

“The *compassion* that Jesus so often felt was nothing short of a gut-twisting emotional reaction to the reality of other people's suffering. His guts twisted for hungry people, for sick people, for blind people, for people grieving a lost loved one, for people who were spiritually harassed, lost, exhausted and grieving.”

Dr. Williams notes that in every single New Testament instance this compassion inspired action. Jesus makes blind men see, raises a widow's son from the dead, comforts the sorrowful, and teaches the spiritually confused.

The first thing we are told Jesus did, in our gospel lesson today, is that out of *compassion*, He healed the sick.

The word translated *sick* here means “without strength.” They were without strength to recover on their own or be made well; no human strength was going to provide relief.

But even these who were without strength, used their last reserves of energy to come to this remote place to hear and be with Jesus—many no doubt carried there by others out of kindness.

Seeing this, was quite literally, gut wrenching for Jesus, and He responded by healing them.

The second thing Jesus did out of compassion was to feed the hungry.

It was the disciples who first broached the subject with Jesus: something must be done! These people will experience extreme hardship if we do nothing!

¹⁵As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

It was an extremely large crowd.

We are told in verse 20 that there were 5,000 men (as well as women and children). The total figure easily surpassed 10,000 and many scholars think the multitude was as large as 25,000.

In feeding so many, Jesus teaches us that

Little is much when offered with thanksgiving to God (verses 17-19)

¹⁶Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." ¹⁷"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. ¹⁸"Bring them here to me," he said. ¹⁹And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people.

In the gospel of John we are told that it was Andrew who located the boy with the five loaves and two fish, and it was also Andrew who sighed, *"but what are they among so many?"* (John 6:8-9)

Our resources seem so inadequate when the needs of people around us are so great. Our abilities seem so insufficient to solve the problems of homelessness, or the spread of the Corona virus, or the loss of income for businesses or the lack of work for the unemployed during this pandemic. Multiply that on a world-wide basis and our efforts seem as futile as bailing out the Titanic with a teaspoon.

Those who work with relief agencies talk about compassion fatigue—where the immense needs of a humanitarian crisis and the limited resources available, completely overwhelms the workers and leads to an emotional numbness to the needs around them.

God understands our limitations.

Psalm 103:13-14 says: *As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.* (NIV)

God has compassion for those He has made from the dust of the earth. God knows our resources and abilities are limited, but His are not.

God does not want us to show compassion out of our limited means, but out of his unlimited abundance.

When I was a Pastor in Illinois, I was a member of the board of a Christian organization that helped provide for the most needy in our community.

We worked with other social agencies to coordinate getting them help, and we would try to fill in the gaps.

Often the stories were heart-wrenching—the needs were overwhelming and the resources nonexistent. Many, many times we cried to the Lord for help and God would unfailingly provide.

A woman would call saying her refrigerator stopped working and her husband was just laid off from his job, could we help? We'd pray and someone would call me and ask, "Pastor, do you know someone who needs a refrigerator? We just remodeled our kitchen and have a perfectly good refrigerator we don't need anymore."

The apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 4:19, *And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.* (NRSV)

And that brings us to the final truth of this text. Jesus demonstrated that:

God will satisfy our needs (verses 20-21)

²⁰*They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.*

Surprisingly, Jesus did not just give them a snack to tide them over until they could get home, he fed them until they *were satisfied*.

Not only was everyone fed, but there were leftovers!

Can God meet your needs? Yes, and more than meet them.

But remember that God promises to provide for our needs, not our wants. God won't give us everything we want, because he knows that not everything we want will be good for us and actually satisfy our needs.

Our Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 55:1-2 gives an invitation, a warning, and a promise: *¹"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. ²Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.* (NIV)

The root cause of every sin is not being satisfied with God and with what God has provided.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve succumbed to temptation because they weren't satisfied with a perfect environment. They wanted more. They wanted to be like God instead of being satisfied with God. As a result, Adam and Eve lost what should have truly satisfied them.

But if we are not satisfied with God, then nothing in this world will fill that aching void.

Again, Isaiah speaks for God when he says: *Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is*

good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. (Isaiah 55:2 NIV)

Psalm 34:8 tells us about eating what is good: *Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.* (NIV)

Jeremiah 31:14 tells us: ". . . My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, says the LORD." (NKJV)

Psalm 36:7-8 exclaims: *How precious is Your loving-kindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings. They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures.* (NKJV)

There have been times, early in our marriage and in our ministry, that Linda and I and our family lived far below the poverty line. We were desperately poor, but our needs were always met.

When we had a need, we would pray for God's provision. One of my favorite stories of how God provided for us was when Paul was about five years old and needed new sneakers. We had no money to buy them but God had taught us not to *worry about anything but pray about everything*.

Philippians 4:6 (TLB) Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything; tell God your needs, and don't forget to thank him for his answers.

So we prayed. It was that day or the next that one of Linda's best friends from our church called and said, "I feel a little awkward asking you this, but does Paul need any sneakers?" (True story) She said, "my father-in-law was walking by a store having a sidewalk sale. There was a big bin piled with kids Converse tennis shoes with a sign: 25¢ per pair!" Now even more than 30 years ago, that was a steal. She said, "My father-in-law can't pass up a bargain and bought the whole bin. Can you use any shoes?" We ended up getting the size Paul needed and the next two sizes as well.

I could tell many, many stories of how God fed and clothed our family during those years. Jesus said in Matthew 6:31-33, ³¹*So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'* ³²*For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.* ³³*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* (NIV)

What is vastly more important to God than meeting our physical needs, is fulfilling our spiritual needs.

Jesus promised that he will satisfy the deepest longing of our souls.

In John 6:35 . . . *Jesus said . . . "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.* (NKJV)

Only Jesus can truly satisfy the hunger and thirst of our souls. Only in coming to Him and receiving Him into our hearts as our savior and Lord will we find the satisfaction we were created to enjoy forever.

Let us pray . . .

Benediction: Ephesians 3:20-21

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (NIV)