

The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
August 28, 2011
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Matthew 14:13-21

When 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. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. As 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." 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. And 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. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children. (NIV)

Can an appetizer be a whole meal? I've actually seen some appetizers at places big enough to satisfy a person's hunger. You could say an appetizer could on occasion be a meal. But can a meal be an appetizer? I suppose if you were at a great feast or had a huge menu to choose from, and you were really, really hungry, maybe you would have a meal before another meal. The first meal would serve as just the appetizer. Today, we have an amazing miracle as Jesus gives thousands of people a satisfying meal. But I pray we realize this meal was still just an appetizer, and I pray we always recognize that:

Jesus Gives Us More than Just An Appetizer!

We read: "*When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.*" In this chapter we are told that wicked king Herod's conscience stricken mind was playing tricks on him. He had heard about Jesus' miracles and now thought Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead. Then Matthew records how the cousin of Jesus had been killed. Perhaps you remember the gruesome details. Herod made a foolish promise to his half niece/stepdaughter after her wild dancing had pleased his guests and him. She and her mother request the head of John the Baptist on a platter and this is exactly what they got. In the previous verse we read: "*John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.*" We can comprehend why Jesus wants to get away. We understand why Jesus would want to be left alone for some peace and quiet. So Jesus privately gets on a boat and heads for a solitary place.

Yet peace and quiet, some time to rest and be alone for a while, is not about to happen for Christ at this time. "*Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns.*" As this great crowd makes the up to eight mile journey around the lake to see Jesus, as all these people gather in this place, I would like us to notice something. Note the difference between Jesus and His disciples - the same sharp difference between Jesus and us. I can't speak for all of you but when I've had a rough and busy day and I'm worn out and mentally and physically beat down, I do not even show the concern or give

the time I should to my wife and kids whom I love. But Jesus shows even greater love & concern for a whole crowd filled with strangers. ***“When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.”*** You might translate that Jesus has a heart filled with tenderness for the people, as Luke adds, ***“because they were like sheep without a shepherd.”*** So Jesus takes time for them. He heals their sick. He teaches them God’s truths. And when they have no food, Jesus gives them more than just an appetizer.

More on that in a little bit, but for now note the actions of the disciples. ***“As 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.’”*** John records how Jesus put the question to the disciples of how to provide for this eager, but now hungry, crowd who made the journey just to see Him. This is the disciples’ response - ***“send the crowds away.”*** They are ready to dismiss them, as they were with the persistent woman who had the sick daughter, as they were with the parents who were bringing their little children to Jesus. Perhaps this is why their always teaching Savior gives them such a strong command: ***“They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”***

Then note another characteristic of the disciples here that all too often fits you and me as well. They were people of little faith. ***“We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered.*** John tells us that Philip made the observation that eight months wages wouldn’t even give everyone a bite. They all came to the conclusion this little food they had wouldn’t help; they didn’t even have enough to have an appetizer let alone a meal! Again do you see the big difference between Jesus and His disciples? Oh, how we are so like those disciples! We show it every time we have a lack of concern for others, when our hearts are anything but tender and filled with compassion. We show it when we don’t do what we can for people’s needs - both their physical and spiritual ones. We show it in our lack of faith in Jesus, with all our doubts and low expectations of what our God can and does do. This, my friends, is the difference between a perfect man - Jesus, and sinners - us. This is why we sinners always need Jesus and what Jesus gives.

“Bring them here to me,” he said. And 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. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.” With simple straightforward words Matthew describes the miraculous way in which Jesus provides food for all these people. We are given a head count of the men which was about 5000. A careful estimate would be 15,000 people when you include all the women and children. But the number is not really the important thing because Jesus could have fed two million, after all, once again He proves Himself to be the Almighty Son of God.

But what Jesus does for the people here is the real point. Jesus provides for their needs. Jesus provides the best. The Greek words here describe a crowd that was very hungry - these words also describe a crowd that is able to walk away very satisfied. Everyone is able to eat until they are full. Jesus even has the disciples gather 12 full

baskets of leftovers so they are not wasted. Jesus doesn't just provide them each a bite. He doesn't just give these people who came all the way to see Him, and even carried their sick to Him, just enough to hold them over. Jesus gives them more than just an appetizer! After giving thanks, Jesus gives all these hungry people a full meal - a miraculous meal. Here we are reminded as the Psalmist writes about our Lord: ***"The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing."*** (145)

But now I want us to go back to the question I first posed this morning. I'm not asking again if an appetizer can be a meal, but if a meal can be an appetizer? What I'm getting at is seeing what Jesus does here at this meal as just the beginning of what Jesus wants to give His people. As filling and satisfying as it was, we will be mistaken if we don't realize that this meal was just an appetizer. We will be like many in these crowds who after this miracle want to turn Jesus into a mere bread king. They want Jesus only for what Jesus can do for the here and now, only how Jesus can make their lives on earth better and more comfortable. Please understand, I'm in no way trying to downplay this great meal, this awesome miracle, which by the way is the only miracle in His earthly ministry recorded by all four Gospel writers. No doubt this miracle is amazing.

However, when it comes to what Jesus gives, when it comes to Jesus' compassion, when it comes to what Jesus truly came to provide for each and every one of us, this meal was just an appetizer! About one year later Jesus would show all people the full extent of His love. His compassion for sinners would lead Jesus to a cross for them, for us. Jesus gives so much more because Jesus gave us His very life. He gives us His own body which He gave on the tree. He gave us His own blood poured out on the cross for our sins. Jesus gives us His own body and blood for our forgiveness in a very special meal - His Holy Supper. Jesus' blood washes away all our sins of selfishness, all the times we showed little or no concern for others in need, all the times we sinned by showing such little faith in Him. Jesus' death removes all our sins of doubting that Jesus could somehow do more with less.

Jesus' resurrection leaves us more than satisfied - it leaves us filled with every spiritual blessing. It leaves us wanting to come back to Jesus again and again and again. For Jesus, as He taught after this miracle, truly is the bread of life come down from heaven and all who eat and drink, all who believe in Him, have everything they need for eternal life. I pray our lesson today teaches us these truths: Jesus fills all our needs - both physical and spiritual. Jesus will never turn us away. Jesus will love us even though we don't deserve it. Jesus will keep teaching us how to love others. Yes, Jesus gives more than just an appetizer. *Bon appetite* dear Christians! Amen.