

## **Matthew 14:13-21**

Don't take this the wrong way when I say, "You're going to witness a miracle today." No, I'm not going to come down out of the pulpit, lay my hands on you, and cure you of your ailments. I have no authority to do such a thing, so I do not have the ability. The miracle you are witnessing today does involve me, but only in the exact same way the disciples of Jesus were involved in our text.

That is something that is different about the feeding of the 5,000. This miracle stands out from the others Jesus did, because in this one He used His disciples to carry it out. He did not need to, yet He chose to.

The people were hungry. It had been a long day. They had traveled far to a desolate place. Jesus had been healing their sick. It was now suppertime. But there were no McDonald's or Burger King's around; not even a Quick Trip where they could buy some snacks.

Now certainly Jesus could have said the word and everyone's belly would have been filled in an instant. Or He could have caused picnic baskets of food to suddenly appear beside every family. But that's not what Jesus desired to do. Instead, He did a miracle using humble means--a small portion of bread and fish. And He carried out this miracle using the hands of sinful men.

Do you suppose that there were some in the crowd who refused to eat? Not because they didn't like bread and fish, but because they didn't like the server? Have you ever gone to a restaurant and walked out because you didn't like the way the waiter set the food down in front of you? It's not the waiter who makes the food. He just serves the food. It wasn't the disciples who performed the miracle with bread and fish. They just served the people. And it's not the pastor who prepares the meal for you here in church. The pastor is the server, the waiter if you will, who distributes the food, as the Twelve did, to the people whom the Holy Spirit gathers into God's house.

And when you, in a restaurant, really enjoy the food, you do not summon the waiter, do you, to thank him for your delicious steak, because he did not prepare it; he just served it.

The point is that the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 is the pattern for our worship today. It wasn't just a miracle, but it is the miracle that is repeated every time the church gathers for worship. Worship does not take place in a vacuum, or out in a cornfield, or in the woods, or even when it's just you or me sitting down privately with God. Every worship service is a miracle replicating the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. Whether it's two or three gathered together, or whether it's dozens, hundreds, or thousands, it is always done in the exact same way: Jesus uses humble means--water, words, bread, and wine--He prepares the meal with these means, and He uses the hands, feet, and mouths of His called disciples to serve His meal to His people.

I am very uncomfortable with people referring to a church using the name of the pastor. This is not Pastor Bell's church. Immanuel, in Washington, is not Pastor Bangerts' church. St. Paul, in New Melle, is not Pastor Piper's church. We're just waiters. You don't refer to a restaurant by the name of the waiter who works there. The feeding of the 5,000 was not about the disciples;

not in the least. If it had been about the disciples, there would have been no feeding. They wanted to send the people home. It was Jesus' miracle. The great feeding that day took place because of His compassion. The people went away satisfied because of Jesus...although Jesus used His disciples to distribute the food to the hungry people.

It's the same way with Christ Lutheran Church. This restaurant has an owner. It's not me, nor is it you. You are the hungry people who come here to eat. I am the waiter called to serve you. Jesus owns this restaurant. He is the chef here. He prepares the meal. It is the meal of His grace. There is no meal out there like it. People can and do speak of God's love and mercy out there. But this is the place where God's love and mercy are served. There was one place on earth where the meal was prepared--on a cross where God's Son died for every sinner, where He died for you. And there is one place where this meal is served--here where the Holy Spirit gathers sinners around the Word and Sacraments of Jesus.

In a restaurant, you never see the cook. The one who prepares the food is hidden from the eyes of the hungry people who come to eat. All you see are the servers, the waiters. If a person didn't know better, he might think that the waiters ran the restaurant; that they did everything from making the meal to serving the meal.

The 5,000 might have thought the same thing. They saw the disciples bringing food to them. They may have seen Jesus in the distance breaking the bread and fish into pieces, but they were not crying out that they were witnessing a miracle. They were eating food...food that twelve men were bringing to them. They ate and were satisfied.

When you sit down in church, do you ponder the truth that a miracle is taking place? And that you are the recipient of that miracle? Maybe not. Like in a restaurant, like the 5,000, you see the waiter before you. You hear him speaking to you. You eat this food with your ears, and you eat the meal placed on the altar for you with your mouth. But you don't see the One who prepares the food. It's easy to form an opinion of a church based upon what our eyes see. But all we see is the waiter, and all we see is ordinary bread and wine. The great miracle here for you is that as Jesus had compassion on the 5,000, so He has compassion on you. As He healed them, so He heals you of your wounds caused by sin. He restores you by His grace. And He feeds you with His gifts.

If you're hungry, you will leave this restaurant satisfied. Jesus never disappoints. If you are not here with a burden of sin; if you are not upset at yourself because of how you acted last week; if you really don't have much to forgive, then you'd be better off at the McDonald's or Steak and Shake in Washington. And you will have to deal with God yourself on Judgment Day.

But if you are hungry...spiritually hungry; if you hunger and thirst for righteousness; if your confession is that you are a wretched sinner whose greatest need is for mercy, then welcome to your Lord's table.

Pay no attention to the waiter. All he does is serve the food. Pay attention to the One who has prepared the meal for you. See, not with your eyes, but with faith. Jesus is here, but as in any restaurant, He is hidden from your view. But His food is here set before you. Take and eat.

Friend, your sins are forgiven. God is at peace with you for Jesus' sake. You and I have acted in disobedience against God, against our neighbor. But God acts in compassion toward you. You, He forgives. And here with His forgiveness--given to you at the altar with Christ's body and blood--Christ here enters you to live in you. He lives in you to help you resist evil and do what is right. It is Christ who will help you when temptations come.

This food is not eliminated from the body. Jesus prepares the meal, and Jesus is the food you eat. As often as you eat and drink, it is not you who live, but Christ who lives in you and through you. All this is a miracle. The miracle that takes place in worship. We do not have 5,000 gathered here, but you whom God has gathered are the ones whom Jesus is feeding today so that you, as you leave, will leave satisfied. Amen.