

A Feast with Jesus

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Preacher: Rev. Thomas Hinson

[0:00] So, whenever our kids have a birthday, we sort of have a tradition where one of the things I'll ask them, whatever you want for dinner that night, within reason, if it's possible, I'll make it for you. Right? So I sort of throw the door open, which is a risky proposition, right? Kids our age, highly creative thinkers. On Friday, our daughter turned nine, and so I said, anything you want me to make?

And do you know what she said? Baby back ribs and mac and cheese. And if you know anything about me, you know that that filled my heart almost to the point of tears with joy. And I thought, we've raised her right. You know, our job as parents is pretty much done, and I know what I need to know about the heart of this girl. And so, we feasted on ribs and mac, and it was awesome. And, you know, but I love, and some of you are like this, we've talked about it, I love cooking for people because it's a way, I feel like when you cook for somebody, it's a way of showing them that you love them.

You know, it's kind of a love language. And I think that's true for people in general. I think when somebody makes you food or provides you a meal, you feel loved by that. I mean, I certainly do, right? It works both ways. And what we're looking at this morning in Matthew 14 is really a story about that. It's about how making food for people is a way of showing love. God actually calls his people to do this. Jesus, in this encounter, this story that we're going to read this morning, calls his disciples to make dinner for a crowd, right? But it's a little bit bigger than making dinner for your family or even maybe the biggest dinner party you've ever hosted. In this case, it's thousands of people. And the other twist is that they have no supplies whatsoever.

So, we're going to look at this, and what it really shows us is how Jesus responds to people in need. How does Jesus respond to a world that is hungry? Not just physically, but spiritually.

And how does Jesus call us to do the same? And what we're going to see is that he responds to a world in need with compassion and calling and provision. Let's pray. Lord, Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. And Lord, as good as it is to be able to eat things like ribs or macaroni and cheese, Lord, what we most need is to feast on you, to feast on word, to feast on through the sacraments, to feast on your presence, Lord. We need to be filled by it. And Lord, that's why we're here. I pray that you would open our hearts, that if anything in us is...any part of our hearts is hard or resistant, that you would soften our hearts, that we would be receptive to your word and spirit.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So, first of all, we're going to just sort of set the scene here. The first thing that we see is this example of the compassion of Jesus for people in need. Imagine losing someone that you love. And some of you, that's happened recently. You don't have to think too long about that. So, imagine you've lost somebody you love. And imagine that as a part of your grieving, you've done, you know, you've been around friends and family. You've gone through the, you know, the funeral and all of that and you're exhausted and you just need some time to be alone.

[3:35] And so, imagine you find an Airbnb and it's out in a remote place. It's on the edge of a beautiful lake and you just can't wait to go and spend the weekend at this lakeside cabin just to get some time to pray and to reflect and to think, to not have to be on for all of the people that are trying to wish you well and comfort you. And so, you get excited and you pack your bags and you load up your car and you drive way out into the country. And imagine, unbeknownst to you, somebody has found out the address of the Airbnb that you rented. And they have put it online. They've publicly put it online. And so, imagine when you're coming up that hill to that lakeside cabin, you see cars lining the street on both sides. There's nowhere for you to park. Imagine as you get closer, there are just crowds of people and they're not only in the driveway, they're filling the yard and they're all, and you look down to your right and you look down to your left and there's just people everywhere. Imagine that for just one minute. And imagine that you realize very quickly, they're not there to

comfort you or help you. They're there because they've brought their hunger. They've brought their grief. They've brought their brokenness.

They've brought their unanswered questions and unfulfilled longings. And they're all waiting and expecting for you to meet those needs. Right? Imagine how you would feel. This is what happens to Jesus in this story. Right? Jesus is, he's just received news that his cousin and dear friend John was murdered.

And he was murdered because he had the courage to speak truth to power. He confronted the local ruler, Herod, for his immorality and marrying his brother's wife. And power responds as power often does.

He was thrown in prison. And then later he was executed. He was violently beheaded. And this news has come to Jesus and he is grieving. Right? He's grieving the loss of his dear friend. He's grieving the injustice that led to such a death. And he just wants to be alone. And I just want to, this isn't the point here of the sermon, but wanting to be alone is a profoundly human response to grief.

[5:47] If any of you have ever grieved, and I know you have, sometimes you just need to be alone to process and to pray and to sort out your feelings and to not have to be on. So this is what Jesus wants. He goes away to be alone, but the crowds don't get the memo. And when he lands on the shore of the lake, there are thousands of people waiting for him. Now, what I want you to see is his response. He very easily could have remained in the boat.

Honestly, that's probably what I would have done. I would have seen it and I would have, you know, and I would have started, you know, that would have been my response, you know. Probably many of you the same. Or some of us might have gotten angry, right? And nobody could have blamed Jesus for saying, hey, I'm going to take a day off, you know. Nobody would have blamed him. But Jesus' response to their need in verse 14 is this. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. And that word compassion describes something that you feel deep inside. It describes something that moves you in the core of your being. It's a word that describes what happens when you see someone else in suffering or in need and you allow that in to touch your heart. You allow their pain to connect with you on a heart level and you respond with a deep move of your soul. That's compassion. And this compassion that moves Jesus, moves him to respond and to take action. And so he begins to care for them and he begins to heal their sick and to meet their needs.

The point of this is not teaching that we should never take a break. The point, and I think sometimes it has been misapplied that way. We need to be more like Jesus. And it doesn't matter if you're tired. It doesn't matter if you're overwhelmed. The point is not, I believe, to teach us that we should never rest or take time to grieve. Jesus' desire for solitude was completely legitimate. And there are times when we need that. The point of this is to show us why Jesus is so remarkable. It's to show us why we need him and why there's something in him that can't be found anywhere else. Because listen, we do get overwhelmed. We do get exhausted. We do get compassion fatigue. We reach our limit because we are finite creatures. And especially, I think, in the internet age, we are constantly exposed through the internet to horrific, overwhelming tragedy all around the world all the time. And so the minute something catastrophic happens on the other side of the planet, we all know about it. And we are reading the grisly details.

And what happens in a world like that is that very often you find your brain shutting down and there's this voice in your head that says, I know I should care, but I just can't. I'm too tired. I just want to watch something on Netflix and go to bed. The point is, Jesus is not like us in that way. When it comes to Jesus, his compassion is inexhaustible. And his capacity is unlimited. All right, so the next time we feel overwhelmed, I would encourage you to resist that urge and to resist that voice in you that tries to shame you or guilt trip you for feeling overwhelmed. Instead, let that remind you, this is why I need a Savior. And this is why I can't be a Savior. It reminds us, next time we feel overwhelmed, whatever it is, whatever the need might be, we can come to Jesus. And Jesus can handle it. And if you're ever tempted to think, if you're ever tempted to think things like, well, surely God must be sick of me praying the same prayer again and again and again. And just imagine God rolling his eyes. Jesus saying, I can't believe you're saying it again. Remember, in this way, Jesus is not like us. His compassion is inexhaustible. His capacity is unlimited. The next time that you're tempted to think that God couldn't possibly care about my needs, surely there are real big needs in the world. Surely he can't care about my little need, like whether or not I do well on the test

tomorrow or whether or not I'm going to be late for that interview, right? Surely God cares about the big stuff, but not stuff like this.

[10:42] Jesus, I want you to remember, his compassion is inexhaustible. His capacity is unlimited. Any and every time we come to Jesus with our need, he responds this way with compassion. And maybe some of you need to hear this. I don't know. Not for everybody, but maybe some of you need to hear this.

If Jesus has such compassion for you, should you not have the same compassion for yourself? I think there's some of us here who one of the biggest challenges is our lack of compassion for ourselves. There's this kind of relentlessness, this voice in us that is driving us and driving us and driving us. And I don't know where that voice got in. I don't know whose voice it was when you first heard it and you internalized it. If Jesus has this compassion for you, should you not have the same compassion for yourself? Otherwise, take it up with Jesus. So, Jesus is able to handle what we cannot. He's got an unlimited capacity. Now, having said that, when it comes to all the needs of the world, we do have a part to play, right? It's also not an option for us to simply turn our back, walk away, and say that's somebody else's problem. So, what is our role in responding to the needs of the world? We see this in verses 15 and 16. It starts to get late. The disciples notice a need. They realize as they look around, hey, it's getting late. Most of these people, probably word spread where Jesus was going to the kind of far side of the lake and word got around. And most people just grabbed their people and grabbed what was right. And they just took off because, oh, he's going to be there. Let's get there before he does. And then maybe he'll heal, you know, my uncle or my son. And so, they've rushed.

And so, they haven't brought any provisions. And so, the disciples are, so, really, it's getting late. It's time for the evening meal. And nobody brought any provisions. There's no plan to take care of these people. And so, they come to Jesus with what they think is a good idea. Master, it's getting late. Why don't you send these people into the villages? If they start walking now, they can make it before it gets too dark and too late. And they can buy or procure food for themselves in the villages so we don't have a big mess on our hands. Jesus replies, they don't need to go away.

And you can imagine the disciples are like, okay, you know, what's your plan? And then Jesus says, you give them something to eat. And right away, we know Jesus is about to do something. The tone shifts, right? Tells everybody to sit down. We know Jesus is about to teach us something. But I want to pause and just recognize they come to Jesus with a need. And then Jesus turns it around and gives it back to them. And he says, you do something. But that something means doing something utterly impossible, right? And I don't know if you've ever felt that way, sort of faced with something that feels utterly impossible. That's exactly how they felt. Now, we're going to get to the impossible bit in a second. I want to make a point here, though. This is very often how vocation works.

[13:52] What do I mean by vocation? A lot of times, especially in D.C., when we talk about vocation, people think we're talking about career, how I get paid, my kind of career path. That's part of your vocation. But your vocation is a lot bigger than that. Vocation simply means your calling, right? And it's a lot bigger than your occupation or your career. Your vocation is God's call for you to use who you are and what you have to serve him and to serve others and to share in the healing of the world. Your vocation is God's call for you to use who you are and what you have to serve him, to serve others, and to share in the healing of the world. That's your vocation. So vocation often begins, right? You can take the Myers-Briggs and you can do your Enneagram type and you can figure all those things out. Helpful, great input, great data, grist for the mill. Your vocation often begins when you notice a need. You notice something. You notice someone is suffering and nobody seems to be paying attention. You notice a gap. There's something missing here. This is a problem that nobody's trying to solve.

Or you notice an opportunity. This is a resource that could be used in this way, but nobody seems to be doing it, right? You notice something. And then you keep thinking about it. And this is the thing, right? Certain things you notice and you're like, yeah, and it doesn't really, but other things you kind of notice it. And then as you're walking away, it keeps kind of, it keeps working at you. It's like nagging and like needling you, you know, and you go to bed and you're trying to sleep and you're laying there and you just kind of keep thinking about it, you know? It's just kind of won't leave you alone. And so in prayer, you bring it to Jesus, you know? And sometimes you bring it to Jesus and he takes it and you go on your way. But sometimes you bring it to Jesus and it's almost as

though Jesus responds to you by saying, yeah, this is a need. Why don't you do something about it?

He says, why don't you take action? I'm in process of meeting this need. I'm inviting you to join me in that. So John Van Hengel was volunteering at a soup kitchen and he was giving food out and he talked to a mom and she mentioned that she had been digging through the dumpsters behind this business building looking for food to feed her kids. He's heartbroken by this, but he also realizes, hey, businesses, there's a lot of waste. Businesses tend to throw away a lot of food that doesn't get eaten.

And so he cobbles together the money that he can, which is about \$3,000. He gets a church to donate an abandoned building that's not being used for anything else. And he has this crazy idea where he says, why don't the businesses start coming and they can deposit the food that they're not eating instead of throwing it away, they can deposit it here. And then people who are hungry and in need can come and they can withdraw that food to feed themselves and their families. So he says, it's kind of like a bank. It's kind of like a food bank, right? And so that becomes St. Mary's food bank, which is the first of its kind, the birth of the food bank movement, right?

[17:01] You have Cicely Saunders, who's a physician. She's caring for people who are terminally ill and dying. And she begins to realize, you know, these people need a lot more than just physical care. They need somebody to manage their pain. They need somebody to help them manage their relationships with their friends and family. They need somebody to help them with the emotional and spiritual dimensions of death and dying. Sometimes they just need somebody to sit next to them and hold their hand. And so she establishes St. Christopher's Hospice in London, which was the first hospice, the first of its kind, right? Now, not everybody's vocation leads them to start a non-profit or movement, obviously. The point is that all of these people started the same way. They're just going along in their normal life, and they just kind of notice a need.

And they look around, and nobody else seems to be noticing it. And then it sticks with them. And that Jesus at some point says, yeah, why don't you do something about that? Right? So I think of Brian Bakke, who lived in this neighborhood for years and years and just noticed there's a lot of trash on the street. And it just kind of kept staying with him. And so he starts going out and pushing a shopping cart around and gathering up trash. And he just begins to do that year after year after year. And neighbors start to get to know this guy who's cleaning up our neighborhood, right? I think of a couple in our church. There's actually been a lot of people like this. There's a couple in our church who they just tuned into the fact that some people, even in the best churches, have a harder time connecting and making friends. There are just always going to be people on the fringes, on the periphery. And so this couple just decided, hey, one of the things that we're going to do, and there was no name for it. There was no 501c3, right? This is just a couple who said, on certain nights of the week, we're going to open our home and we're going to intentionally invite people and try to help them get to know each other and make friends, right? Just help them get connected. I remember in my late 20s, I was working as a counselor and I would meet with people and none of the people that I was meeting with, I worked at a secular clinic, and none of these people were in any way connected to the church. Although a lot of them had very religious longings, none of them were connected to a church. And I think therapy, I think that's very important. I think it's essential. But I kept thinking about the fact that these people need more than a week of therapy. They need more than the meds they're taking. I said, you know, I think these people, they need Jesus and they need a community that can care for them holistically, where they're going to be known, where they're going to be able to walk through their life with people alongside them. You know, they can be cared for body, mind, and soul. And I began praying about this and processing it with other believers. And I started to feel like Jesus was saying, you're right. What are you going to do about it? You know? And so some of us in this room started getting together and are actually joined with a group that was already getting together in Northwest DC. And back in 2008, we started Church of the Advent. Right? So this is how it works. And I think that there are needs and opportunities and gaps that everyone in this room is called to fill. Right? Some of you are called to bring beauty where there's brokenness. Some of you are called to bring order where there's chaos. Some of you are called to bring justice where there is exploitation. Some of you are called to bring reconciliation and connection where there's division. But there are needs that we are called to meet. But here's the thing that we need to understand as we begin to talk about our response to the needs of the world. The minute you say yes to the need, the minute you say yes, the next thing that you're going to

realize is that you don't have enough. Right? Yeah, I want to do something about it. And then immediately you realize, ooh, this is a bigger problem. And I thought it's a lot thornier. It's a lot more complicated. And there's this part of you that's like, you just made a huge mistake.

You should say no. You can still get out of this. You're immediately going to realize that the calling of Jesus always exposes the limits of our resources. So what do we do about that?

That leads us to the provision of Jesus. I want you to put yourself in the place of the disciples for just one minute. Right? Imagine this scene. Even though we commonly refer to this as the feeding of the 5,000, there's a little footnote at the end of this pericope, this unit of text that says that the 5,000 just refers to the men. It's not counting the women and children. So commentators differ in their estimates of what we're dealing with here. But a lot of commentators will say this could be as many as 15,000 or 20,000 people. So Capital One Arena, if you've ever been to Capital One Arena, when it's packed, total seating capacity at Capital One is about 20,000 people.

[21:59] I want you to imagine standing in the middle of Capital One, sold out, looking around, realizing everybody's starving, and Jesus looking at you and saying, you feed them. Right? That's how they felt. And so they must have thought that this was crazy. I mean, it's utterly absurd. All they have is five loaves of bread and two fish. And John's gospel tells us that they got that from this little boy. And he probably brought it for his family's dinner. Right? His job in the family was probably carrying the food for the evening meal because they actually planned ahead. And they get there, right? And isn't that the way it always is? Right? You get there and you're like, we planned ahead unlike these other people. And then everybody starts looking at you. Right? You're the only one with a pack of food. Right? And so this boy gives the food to the disciples and they show it to Jesus. That's all we got. It's not even barely enough to feed a family. So Jesus says, bring them to me. He tells everyone to sit down. They realize, okay, Jesus is about to do something. And even though they must have felt crazy, they offer the bread to Jesus. Now we're going to come back to that. It says, 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. And then everyone eats their fill and is satisfied. And there are 12 baskets of food left over. And friends, clearly this is a miracle. But we get distracted by saying, well, how did he actually do it? And what actually happened?

Not the point of the text. Matthew's not interested in telling us the how. He wants to point us to the deeper question of what it means. And I would suggest it means a couple of things. There are kind of layers of meaning here. If you've been here the past few weeks with Pastor Hillary and looking at these parables in Matthew, this is just another, this is a kind of embodied parable. Right? The miracles of Jesus are just another form of parable. He's teaching us through what he's doing rather than what he's saying.

But the sense of layers of meaning is always there. It's like an onion. You just go deeper and deeper and deeper. Here's the first thing I would suggest it means. It means first, whatever Jesus commands, he supplies. Whatever Jesus calls you to, he will provide what you need to obey that command. Right?

So he commands the disciples to feed the crowds, but then he supplies the food. And the same pattern, I would say, appears all throughout the Christian life. Right? God calls and commands you to do something that seems impossible. But then he supplies what you need. I've seen people respond to God's call to move to a completely different part of the world and do something they never thought possible. And then you see how Jesus responds and supplies over time their ability to do that faithfully. You know, there are people who say, you know, I never thought I was called to singleness. I can't imagine this. And then God supplies over time what they need to live out that call faithfully. Right? I've seen, you see it happen again and again and again. He calls us to follow him in ways that exceed our capacity. And that's the point. That's sometimes how you know that it's the voice of Jesus rather than your own little voice, is if it was my voice, it would be stuff that I was well prepared for, that I was well trained for, that I was well resourced for. But it's the voice of Jesus that will call us to do something that we think that sounds crazy. That might be Jesus. And then he provides what we need to do it. The point is, he doesn't expect us to manufacture miracles. He simply calls us to offer what we have to him. Right? This past week, some of our people, some of you in this room, offered up a few days and nights to go to youth camp. That was your loaves and fish. He said, I've got a little, I've got some time that I'm going to just offer to Jesus, and I'm going to

see what Jesus does with this. And some of us sat around last night and just debriefed the deep and powerful moving of the Holy Spirit, leading youth and adults alike to weep, to cry out for more of the Lord, to pray for revival in this church and neighborhood and city, the Spirit moving people to speak words of knowledge and truth into one another's lives and hearts. You said, here's my loaves and fish. I've got a few days that I can give you. And Jesus says, here's what I'm going to do with that. And everybody receives and everybody eats and everybody feasts on the goodness of God and everybody is satisfied. And that's what you hear people coming back just again and again and again.

[27:03] You wouldn't believe what happened. It's the exact same thing that we see here when people say, I didn't think I had anything to eat. And all of a sudden, somebody handed me a plate of food. Everybody got fed. Right? So I don't know what your five loaves might be. It might be an extra evening each week. It might be your professional expertise. It might be your dining room table or your musical gifts. Right? All the people that play and sing up here, they're offering the loaves and fish. Every time I write a sermon, almost every week that I'm writing a sermon, at some point I feel like this is completely inadequate. I have no idea why I'm doing this. It's utterly pointless. And the only way that I can have learned to respond to that in about 20 years of preaching is to think, these are my loaves and fish. If I'm trying to do something spiritual in people through this myself, I've missed the whole point. My job is to prep. It's to know that it's inadequate, that no human words or wisdom can ever change a heart, and then to offer it to Jesus and to trust that he's going to do what he's going to do. Right? Maybe it's your financial resources. Maybe it's simply your willingness to notice somebody who's alone that nobody else is talking to. Whatever it is, Jesus is not asking you to feed 20,000 people. He's asking you to offer him your lunch and to see what he does. And the second thing that we'll say, the second layer of meaning, the reason that Jesus is able to do this, the reason that we're able to bring that bread to him and to know that he's going to multiply it in ways that we can't possibly imagine is because Jesus is the true bread. Ultimately, this miracle points beyond itself. Remember I said layers? We're going deep into the layers. What does it mean that Jesus is the true bread? Number one, it means that this meal points beyond itself. First, it points back into the past. The Jewish imagination was rich with the memory of God providing for and feeding his people with manna in the wilderness, and they knew that one day the sign of the Messiah would be that that manna would return and that God would feed his people as he had always done. And they're awaiting the messianic sign of the bread from heaven. And Jesus is saying, that's me. I'm here. Right? The meal points to the present in the sense that the wording that Matthew uses to describe this miracle is not arbitrary. He says Jesus took, and then he blessed, and then he broke, and then he gave. This is the language of the Eucharist.

This is the language that is used to describe the Last Supper. When Jesus shares his final meal, and he says, I want you to do this every time you gather until I come again. And through this meal, I will be with you to the end of the age. Right? It's a Eucharistic feast that every time we do this, Jesus is multiplying, right, the fish and the loaves. Jesus is giving us what only he can give us. He's feeding and satisfying his people. And then this points to the future.

This points to that great banquet, the wedding feast that we read about in Revelation chapter 19. The great point and the culmination of all human history when Jesus has returned and vanquished evil and wiped away every tear from every eye and feasts with his saints for eternity in heaven is pointing to that meal. Past, present, and future. All reality, past, present, future, collapsing in on this moment, this miracle, this glimpse of what is to come. And all of this is possible because Jesus is the true bread. Ultimately, what this means is that the one who feeds the hungry crowds here will one day give them even greater than bread that one day he's going to give himself.

Right? So on the cross, this is also pointing us to the cross, Jesus allows himself to be broken for the life of the world. And just as the bread was then placed into the disciples' hands to be shared, Christ now places the gospel into our hands to be shared. Right? So along with whatever other specific ways God has called you to meet the needs of the world, part of all of our vocation is to take that gospel bread, the good news of the true bread, and to go and to give it to anyone and everyone who's hungry.

Right? We, our lives, from here until Christ comes again, our lives are to be spent handing out that bread. Right? Feeding the hungry. There is enough grace. There is enough mercy. There is enough forgiveness. There is enough hope for the world. Why would we not hand it out every chance we have to heal the world? No one who comes to Jesus will ever leave empty. So I want to just pull all

of this together. This, friends, is how Jesus responds to a world in need. First, with inexhaustible compassion. So if that is you this morning, if you just kind of limped in here, and we sort of look below the nice outfit and the makeup and the coiffed hair and the shiny shoes, and below that you're limping and bleeding out on the floor, and you just need, because you know that's true, don't believe what you see. Half of us have just barely made it in here. If that is you, all you need to do is to come and receive that compassion.

[32:52] That's the only thing that's asked of you this morning. Just come and receive that compassion. If you've never done that before, if you've never come to Jesus, you don't even know what that means, a little bit later when we're sharing this meal, we're going to have prayer ministers over here, and if this is your first time and you don't even know how to pray, all you need to do is come up and say, I heard that, I just heard, I want that compassion, I don't know, and these men and women up here will pray for you. And if you want to talk more about that, Hillary and I would be happy to do that after the service. Second, Jesus calls us to join with him in the healing of the world. So I want you to be asking, what needs grab your attention? What do you notice among the people around you?

What grabs you? What God might be calling you to? That's between you and Jesus. Number three, and finally, whatever he calls you to, you can't do it.

But don't let that scarcity mentality stop you from trying. Don't do it in your own strength. Do it through the abundant provision of Christ. So what that means is you look at what you have, whatever paltry offering you can muster together, and you say, here you go. You offer it to him. Bring it to Jesus, bring him what you have, and just watch what he does with it. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you. We praise you. The true bread from heaven. We pray as we continue in prayer and in confession, and as we gather around your table, that we would eat our fill and be satisfied, and that the 12 baskets left over would not just be for the 12 tribes of Israel, would not just represent the 12 apostles, Lord, but that they would be in our hands, that we could take them out to feed all of the people who need to hear your gospel, Lord. We pray all of this in the name of Jesus. Amen.