

The Heavenly Host

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[0 : 00] Now today marks the final sermon in our series, Table Grace, practicing the hospitality of God. And the preacher in the first sermon, you might remember, of this series, shared his desire that our hearts would be melted at God's hospitality.

Now no preacher, him or herself, can achieve that, but only the Spirit of Christ, who graces us to respond to the Lord's hospitality. That is, and we do so with all of our hearts and our minds and our souls and our strength.

And today's lesson, or reading, includes this language of melting, I think, or as Mark narrates it, compassion. So I wonder if you'd turn with me now to page 449 as we just look at that verse in Mark's lesson from chapter 6.

He records, reports, narrates that when Jesus went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them.

Well, the person Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine, is impacted by the human sinful condition. Jesus knows more than anyone else the spiritual rebellious situation of this world.

[1 : 23] And not because he himself is a sinner, but he knows people are determined to rebel and to reject him. And so our Lord sees us, and he is moved, not just from the heart, but from the guts, or literally, in this text, from the bowels.

Now I wonder, is there anything that you might react to like this? I gather the deepest desire or emotion you have like this is probably grief or sadness.

Now think of the greatest loss maybe that you've ever experienced. Maybe it was death, or a job loss, or divorce, or dream, or the loss of health, mind, or money, or maybe even your own integrity, or dignity.

Now imagine the depth of that experience. Jesus' depth of experience, his emotion or desire of compassion, far exceeds that.

Maybe even all of ours, collectively, when he observes these people that have run ahead of him and met him in this place. And so Jesus has that compassion for the crowd, and for you, and for me.

[2 : 41] It says a lot about the Lord, and a lot about us. That compassion compels Jesus to meet the crowds and our deepest need.

And I don't know what you think your greatest need is this morning, but I often forget my greatest need. And today's reading from Mark, chapter 6, beginning at verse 21, reveals and reminds us of that.

Today's sermon text, though, is actually going to be starting from verse 30, and then going to the end. But in verse 30, we find the disciples' return report of their short-term mission project.

And before this, it is the account of John's beheading, which actually the church celebrates. Well, it did last Monday on August 29th. I know that because that's my birthday.

Imagine being born on the remembrance of the beheading of John the Baptist. Just one day earlier, it would have been Augustine's remembrance. But for some reason, my mom had to give birth to me on that day. Anyway, that story is the anti-hospitality or anti-Christ reading.

[3 : 47] You have Herod, who is a host of no compassion and of death-dealing decisions. And before that, then, is the sending of Jesus' disciples, his apostles. And that mission of theirs depended, actually, on the hospitality of those whom they were visiting.

The disciples shared the gospel and word and deed, and the homes that they had visited extended hospitality to them. Now we turn to the feeding of the 5,000, as it's known, or today's title of this is practicing the hospitality of God.

And in this, we see two things. That is the priority of teaching on one hand, and the provision of blessing on the other. So teaching and blessing, a priority and a provision.

So let's first of all look at the priority of teaching for the desolation of heart. After the apostles share with Jesus what they had done and taught, the Lord takes them away to rest.

A little hospice care, but not unto death. The ministry and mission, that is, that they've been on, is actually quite difficult. And while the apostles were thrilled, they needed not a vacation or a holiday, but peace with God through Jesus Christ.

[4 : 59] The disciples, after all, were in a battle, preaching and healing and delivering. And Jesus does something surprising, which is to take them to a desolate place. That's what he explicitly says.

And whenever I hear that, maybe you too think of desolation sound. I remember kind of hiking up Mount Galliano and looking over desolation sound, and there's just a kind of a quietness to it.

Sometimes, though, I must admit, I've been in a, well, other places that are of a desolation of sound too, which is more of a hum and not very, very peaceful.

But these desolate places were those where Jesus himself went to after ministry to commune with the Father. After intense ministry and teaching and healing, Jesus recovered there and prepared himself for the next place of ministry.

And it seems that desolation, then, is a kind of a freedom to receive blessing from the Father. So our desolation is an opportunity for the Father's intention, blessing, and even consolation for us.

[6 : 05] From the Lord's perspective, desolation isn't all that bad. We think of it void of God's presence and provision. But the disciples and apostles of Jesus may see no redeeming value or feature of desolation, but Jesus doesn't agree with these student missionaries as he takes them to this place.

So far from a quiet place of desolation, though, when Jesus and the disciples arrive there, there is a crowd in this place of desolation.

And Jesus has compassion or pity on this crowd of desolation. The explanation Mark gives in verse 34 is this.

When he saw the crowd there, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus' response is quite shocking then, don't you think?

As a minister responsible for pastoral care, I think Jesus might listen or show empathy or come just alongside of people quietly and care.

[7 : 17] He does care for sure, though, doesn't he? And when he does come alongside of them, he responds in a way that comes as something of a shock to us, I think. As 21st century Christian missionaries, we might think that you meet the physical needs first.

The strategy of Jesus is quite different. In verse 34, we read this. And he began to teach them many things.

This is the priority for the desolation of the crowd's hearts and minds. Jesus wasn't surprised by this gathering. He knew right where he was going to go and what was going to happen when he got there.

And he is showing his disciples and apostles another way to meet the Father, I think. He is doing the Father's will, which is to preach the good news, to proclaim the kingdom of God.

So I wonder, have you ever found yourself in need of rest, only to find it undermined? We all need rest and recovery, but the Lord may understand that differently.

[8 : 24] Whatever this situation, we are met there by someone else's need, perhaps. Maybe not a crowd, but a spouse, a parent, a child, a neighbor, or even a stranger.

Maybe not an extended period of time to teach them many things, but long enough to tell and teach and proclaim them of the great compassion of Jesus Christ.

That's the priority of Jesus, to tell the truth of Christ and his kingdom that has come. A presenting need is identified, but a greater need is to know Jesus' mercy, his grace, his goodness, his word, his work.

And then, after that, it may lead to showing them of the great compassion of Jesus Christ in some kind of tangible way. And that's how this story unfolds then. First, this priority of meeting people's greatest need to know the Lord and his kingdom and the good news and word.

Followed up then by this provision of a blessing for the satisfaction of our life. And so Jesus demonstrates his compassion to the crowd, first by teaching and declaring, and then after that, he gives this great blessing to them.

[9 : 47] Jesus doesn't stop with just the teaching. He follows up, and as in verse 42, as you get to the bottom of this, we read this after he's fed them. He says, and they all ate and were satisfied.

That's Mark's comment, his observation, his interpretation. How did they get to this place before they were satisfied with this feeding? It wasn't easy for a crowd of 5,000 men, which probably amounted to 20,000 people.

It wasn't easy for the apostles either. Even though the disciples earlier in the day reported the outcome of their preaching and healing and delivering, they limited the capacity, it seems, the reach and the power of Jesus' ministry.

The apostles disclosed this dilemma to the Lord. This is a desolate place. Now it is late. There is no food. Even more, they share their plan with Jesus.

Jesus, send them away. Well, the Lord's plan was different. He says to them, you give them something to eat and then go and see.

[10 : 58] Set them down. And the Lord then does what only he can do. Jesus is for the desolate crowds more than they can even know or imagine.

what their need is. And so he takes, he looks, he blesses, he breaks, he gives, he divides. And ultimately, in verse 42 again, he satisfies.

Look with me at that verse. Mark writes this. And they all ate and were satisfied. Most translations don't deviate from the word satisfied.

but some do. They say, as one renders it, ate and were filled. Another one says that they ate as much as they wanted. The Lord completes what he starts.

He meets people's need. He completely satisfies. He's the only one who can. And after satisfying the desolation of soul, then here we see that Jesus satisfies the desolation of the body.

[12 : 08] Mark doesn't record the Sermon on the Mount like Matthew or the Sermon on the Plain like Luke as the gospel writers in those occasions say this.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be satisfied, filled with the righteousness of Christ. I think that in this feeding of the 5,000 which is recorded in Matthew and Luke and John as well, Mark is actually showing us what Jesus actually says in Matthew and Luke in the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain.

These people are blessed because they hunger and thirst for righteousness. And he then shows outwardly as a sign what he's done inwardly in their lives with his word.

Complimenting it, confirming it by giving them also what they need physically. And this is what Jesus is doing. This is what he's teaching them as they run and they hunger and thirst for the righteousness of the kingdom of God.

The blessing of bread and fish is this sign then that he's showing them what he's actually already giving them in his word. Now we think we hunger and thirst for bodily and natural matters.

[13 : 29] And some of those are good and real and right, aren't they? But we all have a greater hunger for spiritual, godly, and righteous substance.

And only Jesus can meet that deep and great hunger and thirst. the satisfaction or filling of truth is what makes us too run like the crowds to Jesus.

And so 2,000 people ran ahead of Jesus on that day. People today run all the time. Some behind, some ahead, some actually alongside of Jesus.

Others actually run to him. Some for the right reasons, others for the wrong reasons, making him out to be someone who he's not. But here's the thing, I think, that Jesus works with anyone who runs to him.

Ahead or behind for the right or for the wrong reasons. For Jesus knows that we're all like sheep without a shepherd. Not because of our bodily needs, though our daily bread is important to him as well.

[14 : 42] But everyone is at risk of false teaching. The church has scripture, creeds, consensus of thought. The teaching of our Lord is there to protect and to provide for his sheep.

The proclamation of the gospel is for our perpetual conversion, the past, the present, and the future. And so as we come to the end of this series about practicing the hospitality of God, we encounter the compassion and the satisfaction of Jesus.

The church in St. John's is on a mission. Our mission is one of hospitality. It means we're impacted by the crowds as well.

Crowds in desolate places. crowds that are like sheep without a shepherd. And there are plenty of shepherds, but mostly lost ones in this world in which we live.

G.K. Chesterton once wrote, when people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing. They'll believe in anything. And hospitality then is an introduction to the presence and the proclamation and the person of Jesus.

[16:03] So what are we to do? Let me tell you something contrary to the title. Please don't practice the hospitality of the Lord. Practice the compassion the way Jesus did.

Practice the satisfaction of the Lord. Do both of these in the Lord through hospitality, not the other way around. So find compassion and satisfaction in the Lord through hospitality.

All the time your compassion and satisfaction is in the Lord, whether inviting people or being invited and receiving an invitation, but always practice the Lord's compassion and satisfaction.

And if we practice hospitality for the compassion and satisfaction, I think we'll never find and give compassion or seek the Lord's satisfaction.

But if we put the hospitality of God first, then we'll miss the mark. But if we put the compassion and the satisfaction of our Lord first, then we'll be able to extend and express and to give the hospitality of the Lord and do as the Lord actually said to his disciples, you give, go see.

[17:27] And this is true in all that we do, not just hospitality, as we seek the satisfaction of God, as we extend the compassion of Jesus in everything that we do, in our work, in our ministry, in our relationships, and in our rest.

And when we do, I think, we'll also find what actually Isaiah expressed in the psalm that we read earlier. The psalm was read earlier in Isaiah 25.

And he says this. He says, It will be said on that day, Behold, this is our God. We have waited for him that he might save us.

This is the Lord. We have waited for him. Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. So as we run ahead, as we wait for him, we find his satisfaction, we experience his compassion, and then we extend his hospitality and find joy.

I speak to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.