

Christ the King Lutheran Church – Houston, TX

10th Sunday after Pentecost – August 2, 2026

Isaiah 55:1-5, Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21, Romans 9:1-5, and Matthew 14:13-21

Grace and peace to you, my Christ the King family, near and far! Amen.

“Where will we get food?” That’s not exactly what the disciples asked in our Gospel text today, but it’s the gist of their concern. It’s the end of the day. It’s time to eat. There’s a great crowd. And, it doesn’t look like there’s much food.

It is a problem that most of us can barely relate to. For most of us, food is something we can generally find somewhere. Often it’s as easy as opening a refrigerator. Perhaps we need to drive to a grocery store or a fast food place. Sometimes, we have so many choices, we can’t decide which restaurant we’ll go to today. Or, we can just stay home and have our food delivered. The food systems around us usually work so well that we rarely have to think about them.

But the wilderness in our story changes everything. Our translation calls it “a deserted place.” Literally, the Greek word that’s used means an “empty” or “lonely” or “desolate” or “isolated” place. That gives some color to this place. We could say that being in the wilderness sort of levels the playing field. It removes the things we usually depend on – like the places to get food. It’s interesting because in the deserted places, everyone is brought to the same level. The differences between those who have much and those who have little become less visible. It’s sort of like in the waiting rooms or the Emergency Rooms at the hospital; the differences between people are less visible. Everyone in the ER is needy. In our story, everyone needs to eat.

According to Matthew’s account of this story, Jesus has gone away to a deserted place after hearing of the death of John the Baptizer. He is grieving and seeking solitude, but the crowds follow him. And when Jesus sees them, Matthew tells us: “He had compassion for them.” Think about it: Before Jesus heals them and before Jesus feeds them, he sees them and has compassion for them. It may be one of the most important things to know about Jesus. He sees, and he feels deeply. This Greek word is a loaded one too. It literally means Jesus’ gut churned. When he saw the people, we could say it was gut-wrenching. Wonderfully, he saw beyond his own grief and sadness and saw hungry, grieving, needy, forgotten people from all walks of life in a deserted place. His response is compassion!

But the hour became late, and there were lots of people, and the disciples – surely tired and hungry themselves and feeling the isolation of the place – had a practical solution. It’s time to go home. Send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves. There’s not enough here in this deserted place – and it’s getting late. Let them find what they need on their own. I don’t think that the disciples were being heartless. Their solution is reasonable. It is the way the world normally works. If people need food, they go where food is available. If there is a need, we rely on the systems that provide for that need.

Often, those systems themselves are blessings. We should be grateful for farmers, grocery workers, transportation networks, food banks and all the people who make it possible for food to reach our tables. They are the normal places we go to get food.

But, Jesus, in a deserted place, immediately counters the disciples' solution. "They need not go away," he says, "YOU give them something to eat."

Whoa! The disciples quickly respond themselves. They say what we often say when there's a need. There's not enough here. "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." It's the old, old scarcity argument, isn't it? There is not enough. There is not enough money. There is not enough time. There is not enough food for everyone who is hungry. There is not enough room for all those who want to come into our cities or even our country. And on and on. It's the old scarcity argument. Sometimes, I think, we don't believe there is enough grace! We don't allow for God's economy of abundance.

So, Jesus asks the disciples – and he invites us too -- to look again. He does not ask them – or us -- to pretend the problem is not real. He does not ask them – or us -- to ignore the hunger around them (or around us). He simply asks the disciples – and us -- to bring what they (and we) have. FIVE loaves and TWO fish may seem like a small offering in the face of an enormous need, but in God's economy of abundance it multiplies.

Jesus takes what is offered, gives thanks, breaks it and gives it away. There's more than enough to feed everyone! This miracle reveals the abundance of God.

Now, we need to be careful how we understand that abundance of God. The Episcopal priest Barbara Brown Taylor wrote once: "The problem with miracles is that we tend to get mesmerized by them, focusing on God's responsibility and forgetting our own. Miracles let us off the hook."

Jesus did not say to the disciples, "I'll take care of this." He said to the disciples, "YOU give them something to eat." That is our word too. It begins with gut-wrenching compassion, and it flows out of generosity. We too are called to open our eyes and our hearts and then to use what we have and to trust God's goodness.

Some of you who have been part of the Lutheran family for a while may recall an offertory prayer that we prayed over and over in the old green *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Some of you can probably say it with me by memory. ***"Merciful Father, we offer with joy and thanksgiving what you have first given us – our selves, our time, and our possessions, signs of your gracious love. Receive them for the sake of him who offered himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."*** That prayer is like our Gospel story today. We bring what we have. In our worship we bring our bread and our wine and our money and our time and our talents, and we say, "Here, God, we give you thanks, and we pray that you will bless these gifts, and multiply these gifts and use these gifts – our signs of your gracious love -- for your purposes through us."

The feeding of the five thousand is not Jesus' way of telling people who are hungry, "Just have faith and everything will be fine." God's abundance does not free us from responsibility.

Rather, it calls us into responsibility. The question is not simply, “Will God provide?” The question is also: “Will we become part of God’s provision?” There is an old saying, attributed to various sources: “When we pray for daily bread, we are also praying that God would make us part of the answer.”

That is what Jesus does with the disciples. He does not perform the miracle without them. He does not say, “Stand back and watch.” He says, “YOU give them something to eat.” The disciples are not the miracle. Jesus is. But Jesus chooses to work through their hands.

I once heard about a congregation that had a similar experience during a community meal. They prepared enough food for the number of guests they expected, but far more people arrived than planned. The volunteers began to worry that they would run out of food. Someone suggested making the portions smaller. Someone else suggested that they might need to turn people away. But one person said, “Let’s just keep serving.” And they did. They kept serving until the last person had eaten. The food stretched farther than anyone expected.

That was not Jesus’ miracle in a deserted place, and we must not reduce this amazing miracle to a nice story about generosity or good luck that there was enough food at a congregational meal. But the story tells us something about life in God’s economy of abundance. When we place what we have into God’s hands, abundance begins to appear. The mechanics of the miraculous are often invisible, but that makes them no less real.

The world teaches us to ask: “Is there enough?” “How much do I have?” “How can I protect it?” “What if there is not enough?” “Where will we get food?” Jesus offers us another option: “Bring me what you have.” Bring me what I have first given you!

Isaiah gives us the same invitation in our First Reading today: “Hear, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.” Notice who is invited – not just those who have everything together, and not just those who can pay. Isaiah says, “You who have no money, come.” God’s grace begins not with what we bring to God, but with what God gives to us.

Jesus is not only the one who gives bread; Jesus IS the Bread of Life. He nourishes us with what we need so that we can be what he calls us to be and do what he calls us to do. It’s not because we have unlimited resources. It’s not because we can solve every problem. It’s not because our efforts are enough. But, it IS because Christ takes what we bring, blesses it, multiplies it and uses it. With Christ’s blessing, even small things become part of God’s compassionate work of caring for and feeding the world. Amen.

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Guest Preacher