

Sermon Mark 8 10 7th Sunday after Trinity 1 Year Series

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Text: Mark 8:1-10 (vv. 2,3): “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.”

Theme: Jesus’ compassion.

Goal: To assure Jesus’ compassion on spiritual and on physical matters.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: When we lived in Kenya, we used to go to the Giraffe Center, where the visitors are allowed to feed the giraffes and hug them. Usually people hold some food in one hand, and hug them with the other. If you try to touch them or to hug them without food, they don’t accept it and sometimes they try to push you with their head. It was a sign there, saying: “No food, no friends.”

Pastor André called me from Mozambique last week, reporting me that some pastors were becoming upset with him, because he didn’t have enough money for them to take home for their families; and the families were starving. One of the pastors even reported that when he went back home at the weekend, he found his wife preparing a stew for the children from a rat, because there was no food at home. “No food, no friends.”

It was also difficult for Jesus to host a huge multitude, to teach them kindly, but not to offer them anything to eat. People were about to collapse of hunger.

This is not our case, as we come to the church well fed and sit comfortable during the service, knowing that there is coffee and tea, and sometimes a cake or biscuits, waiting for us after the service. What does this Gospel have to teach us?

I – Jesus taught the people

It's amazing to notice that the large crowd had been with Jesus for three long days in the wilderness just to listen to Him. They were eager to know more about God and His love, about forgiveness and peace, about life and hope. It is a pity that Jesus' teaching during these three days were not recorded by the Evangelist. But the compassion of Jesus was recorded. As it is said, "A picture speaks more than a thousand words." His compassion sealed His teaching with a golden key. Whatever was taught about God's love and care, was demonstrated when each of them received a piece of bread and a piece of fish. Jesus takes cares of the spiritual matters as well as the physical matters of the people. If we don't trust that He gives us the daily bread, how can we trust that He gives us eternal life?

Martin Luther focuses on this Gospel pointing two major concerns of Jesus for His people. He wrote: *This is the first lesson: Our dear Lord Jesus cares so much, and so filled with concern for poor lost souls..... takes pity on these poor, needy people and preaches to them.* The emphasis on Jesus's preaching to the people and the eagerness of people to listen to Jesus is always taken by Luther as an example and a warning to the Christians of his time, and of course, to us as Christians of the 21st Century. Luther applied to our reality the eagerness of the people to learn what Jesus had to teach them and made our responsibility to teach our people with the true words of Jesus, as follows: *Now, since that is the kind of heart Jesus has, when Judgment Day comes, how do you suppose he will deal with lazy pastors who are unfaithful to their office, and who even lead their parishioners astray?... Again, what will fathers and mothers say on Judgment Day if they did not faithfully bring up their children and household to diligently worship in church and study the*

Word? No doubt he will say, You (pastors), fathers, mothers, lords, and ladies, you've had so many people serve under you, you should have trained them in the fear of God and diligently kept them growing in the Word. But you failed to do that, letting them grow up in wickedness and without reverence toward God... This is why there is no higher or greater work we can do on earth than nurturing people with the Word. Oh, how the devil hates such a good work! That is why he attacks it so viciously through sects, tyranny, violence, and persecution. That is also the reason it is such an inherently difficult thing, why it takes so much time and energy to help young people to mature a bit, to accept scriptural principles, and to live in fear and reverence of God. In short, there is no other task so difficult, as to train people to live piously, nor is there a greater service we can render to God.

II – Jesus feeds His people

But Jesus' compassion to His people goes further. He was concerned that they were hungry and that some would collapse on the way back home after staying with and listening to Jesus for three days, because some of them had come from a long distance. And He provides food for them.

This is the second miracle where Jesus multiples some bread and some fish to feed a multitude. At the first one, 5000 men were fed, plus women and children (Mark 6:30ff). Now, 4000 men were fed, plus women and children. *Since this incident took place in the region of Decapolis, the crowd probably was made up of both Jews and Gentiles* (CSSB footnotes). And everyone received something to eat.

According to Luther, this is Jesus' second concern. He wrote: *That is the second gift. The greatest gift is that Christ first preaches to and instructs the people in the Word. The fact that he meets their physical needs by filling their stomachs is the*

lesser gift... With this miraculous deed, our dear Lord Jesus Christ wants to demonstrate that however great the need, he is to this day quite capable of using seven loaves and a few small fish to feed four thousand men... We should burn this lesson into our memories, so that we may learn to believe that, regardless of how poor we may be, if we faithfully and diligently cling to God's promises, our Lord Christ will still provide us with food and nourishment.

It seems that we haven't learnt the lesson. We are always worried about tomorrow; maybe not about the daily bread, because we have abundance of bread on our tables. But about all other issues that surround us: employment, health, pension, security, our future... We know that God knows our needs and that He cares for us. But we are anxious, nervous, stressed... And, eventually, at the right time, everything happens much better than our plans or concerns. Isn't it so? Maybe not always, because God didn't promise to deliver us from all problems and concerns of this life. And once we will face sickness and death. But when we look to the resurrected Jesus, He will lift our eyes to a bigger hope that surpasses our earthly days. And He will comfort us.

Conclusion: To conclude, let's quote Luther again: *So then, today's Gospel lesson is intended to teach us to recognize our dear Lord Jesus Christ as a gracious Lord and Father, who is anxious to help us both physically and spiritually. For that lesson, we should thank God today, and we should pray that he would continue to provide us with his spiritual and physical blessings through Christ. Amen.*

(Sermons of Martin Luther: The House Postils. Vol 2. Ed.: Eugene Klug. Baker 1996. 327-334. Quoted by Phil Brandt, p.25-31)

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 30 July 2017