

Matthew 14:13-21

November 24, 2011 – THANKSGIVING

## Count on God's Deep Compassion

† In times of testing (vv.13-18)

† In satisfied thanks and praise (vv.19-21)

In the name of Jesus, God's **Deep Compassion** in flesh and blood, dear thankful Christians:

People just can't handle power. We're talking raw power. For instance some friends of mine in high school let me to borrow their minibike. (For those too young, a minibike was like a small motorcycle.) My friends warned me the throttle sometimes stuck. "No problem. I'll watch out," I said as I headed off down the gravel road by their farm. It was fun, gunning the engine enough to pop a wheelie out of the ditch and over the approach. Just watch out for that metal culvert. But wouldn't you know it? I got more brave as I kept trying. Finally the minibike came over backwards. No problem, except I let go of the wrong grip. Of course the throttle stuck! It took a few seconds to wrestle that minibike out of its screaming orbit around me. Then I looked around hoping no one saw that!

Beyond men and machines, raw power is dangerous in the hands of tyrants like wicked King Herod in the verses right before our text. The dirty dancing of Salome brought out his drunken oath to give her up to half of his kingdom. She asked her mother who said, "*The head of John the Baptist.*" Salome demanded it "*on a platter.*" (Mark 6:24f) Didn't want to get her hands dirty? When John's disciples went and told Jesus, He "*withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.*" Can the Lord's servants really **Count on God's Deep Compassion** if wicked rulers have such power? How can we...?

† In times of testing (vv.13-18)

Imagine how Jesus must have felt. His cousin John the Baptist was also the last prophet of the Old Testament, His forerunner. Now John had been beheaded in prison for a drunken king's fancy. Besides this, Mark reports that the Twelve disciples had just returned from their first missionary journey. "*Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.'*" (Mark 6:31 NIV84) Dean Lindemann at Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin, told us future pastors we should remember this when tempted to sacrifice ourselves as martyrs by not taking vacations. All workaholics should.

It's true for volunteers in church work and for paid professionals, caregivers and pastors on call 24/7. Thank God for twelve years of WELS worker training! Even though a midnight call is rare, my internal system is wound up more than I realize. Often I notice a few miles from home on vacation how my whole system starts to relax. You feel it a few miles up North. Mind and body need that. But if the cell phone rings, it cranks right up again. Emergencies can feel like a runaway minibike.

Then what? What happens if you try to get away, but the troubles get there ahead of you? In Jesus' case the people literally ran around the lake, the Sea of Galilee. When Jesus got there, thousands were waiting to be healed by the most popular preacher ever. I wish it weren't true, but we all would have reacted like the disciples. It was late. No McDonald's in sight. Jesus' disciples saw only one solution. They told Jesus: "*Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.*" Jesus replied, "*They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.*"

It's hard not to sympathize with Jesus' disciples. He's asking them to do the impossible. Mark's Gospel account records a few more details of their answer: "*That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?*" (Mark 6:37) Even at minimum wage that would be about \$10,000; for a laborer more like \$20,000. It sounds as if they had the money in the till. But human nature asks, "When will that end? How can you ask such a thing, Jesus?"

What if volunteering at church, you've explained something a million times and people still don't get it? Or you worked so hard, but no one seems to care enough to say, "Thank-you!?" Frustration at fellow parishioners only proves we forget our own weaknesses and failings. Someone else's sins always look worse than ours. But our Lord Jesus wants us to contrast our hard feelings with His soft heart, our frustration with His compassion. ***"When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick."*** The disciples' only solution was to send them away. Jesus shows us how we can always **Count on God's Deep Compassion**, especially **In times of testing**.

Then we can see our weaknesses in a new light. For example, working for my Granddad, I knew you should be careful taking a heavy wooden ladder off a house. But early one morning I leaned it toward me and started hand-walking down. Unfortunately, I got the center of gravity too far past me and could not stop it. Fortunately, my head went between two rungs. Unfortunately, the sides of the ladder came down on my shoulders. Fortunately, I landed in the grass. Unfortunately, my prized cowboy hat was smashed down around my ears. Fortunately, no one was looking that time either.

### ✠ **In satisfied thanks and praise (vv.19-21)**

As I taught my kids: *He who learns to laugh at himself has a lifetime supply of good humor.* But we have a problem with God that goes much deeper than our mistakes on screaming minibikes or plunging ladders. Jesus wants all His disciples to see in these impossible situations just how short our arms and foresight really are. He wants us to feel our need, so He can fill our need with His bounty.

Here's the key. When they told Jesus about the little boy's lunch, He replied, ***"Bring them here to me."*** That's what we should do with our troubles in the first place, isn't it? If we would stop looking at ourselves or criticizing those around us, we could simply bring all our wants and needs to Jesus. He has the love and compassion to take care. He has the power to help and to heal. He makes it look so easy, but that's because Jesus is the Creator. He makes the rules; He can break the rules of nature at will.

With the people seated in groups of fifties and hundreds Jesus took the five little breads and two small fish, looked up to heaven, gave thanks, and started breaking off pieces. See how He asks His heavenly Father's blessing? See why we want to say our table prayers before we eat. God loves to bless, so Jesus kept giving to His disciples. They kept distributing until everyone was satisfied. Then in order not to waste anything, He had them collect the twelve basketfuls of pieces. Amazing miracle!

Sometimes we wonder why God doesn't just work a miracle for our family or the church. Why put us in situations where we feel so dissatisfied, when it's so hard to give **thanks and praise**? Much remains hidden in the secret counsels of God. But learning from His Word, we can also know that at times it's no more complicated than my Granddad's advice to me. When I asked him for a new tractor to get more work done on the Ranch, he answered, "Then I wouldn't have enough work to keep you busy." Our heavenly Father uses our shortages to keep us looking to Him for help and blessing.

Did you notice? There's a sad disconnect in our sermon outline. After Jesus' miracle when all the people were **satisfied** there is no record of **thanks and praise**. In fact, the crowd wanted to force Jesus to be their Bread King. And then they all disappeared, all except the Twelve. What happened? Jesus preached His "Bread of Life" sermon (John 6:23-59). He told them you must believe in Jesus to be saved. Abandoned, Jesus asked one of His saddest questions: ***"Will you also go away?"*** Peter's answer is so powerful: ***"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."*** (John 6:67f) **Count on God's Deep Compassion**. His grace gives us **satisfied thanks and praise**. Like cheering for a championship sports teams, we just need to learn how Jesus is our Champion over sin, death and hell. God sent His **Deep Compassion** down to earth in the Person of His Son. Trust His Word, believe in Jesus as your Savior, and God credits you with all Jesus. Your sins? All washed away. Good deeds? Jesus says, "Visited, fed, clothed, nursed...all for me." (Matthew 25:34-40) In Christ you can always **Count on God's Deep Compassion**. Amen.