

## Jesus Served God instead of Self

✠ Providing food (vv.1-14)

✠ Ruling over nature (vv.15-21)

In the Name of Jesus, our Savior whose perfect life and innocent death counts for all, dearly redeemed:

Last Sunday on the Mount of Transfiguration we heard the heavenly Father's voice: *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"* (Matthew 17:5) Flashback three years. Today's Gospel is right after the Father first spoke those words at Jesus' baptism. *"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil."* (Matthew 4:1) With the Father's approval Jesus overcame every temptation to serve **Self** instead of God – from the wilderness to the cross. This text from John 6 is at the peak of Jesus' ministry when He tests his disciples whether they trust in God or **Self**.

Our world is full of contrasts in **Self**. "Birth mothers who place their children for adoption are courageous souls who selflessly give their children unconditional love, a family and the gift of life." They suffer loneliness and emotional pain which only fellow birth mothers can understand. They need to remind each other that they made their choice because of how much they truly love their babies.<sup>2</sup>

Contrast one of the most powerful men in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Survival of the fittest in the 1930's. While the world worried about another evolutionist, Hitler in Germany, Joseph Stalin starved thousands of Ukrainians into submission. His daughter recorded his last expression after a stroke: "[Stalin] cast a glance, insane, angry, full of fear of death, at everyone in the room and, with a final menacing glare, he lifted his hand as if banging down a curse over us all."<sup>3</sup> Compare how **Jesus Served God instead of Self**.

✠ Providing food (vv.1-14)

Nearly a year has passed since last Sunday's sermon when Jesus confronted the self-righteous Jewish leaders at Jerusalem. Now Jesus is back in Galilee, perhaps by way of the Jordan river road, then by boat to the north shore. The Sea of Galilee was also called the Sea of Tiberias, for a town dedicated to Tiberias Caesar. We stayed in Tiberias while visiting Galilee on our Israel 2014 tour.

Anyone with teenage friends or who works with teenagers would have to admire Jesus here. He's tired and discouraged because his cousin John was just beheaded by King Herod. Jesus needs some alone time with his disciples to rest up after their mission trip. Who could blame Jesus if he hid from the crowds following him to that remote place? But you don't hear Jesus saying, "This is Me-time!" He saw the crowds running toward him and he knew it was *"because they saw the miraculous signs he was performing by healing the sick."* They wanted more for themselves. Instead of, "What about Me!" Jesus felt compassion for them *"because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things."* (Mark 6:34) And *"he healed their sick."* (Matthew 14:14) **Jesus Served God instead of Self**.

How often have we failed in this single sin alone? We want to be in charge of our own life – like Adam and Eve when they believed the devil's lie and served themselves forbidden fruit in the Garden. We too are tempted like Jesus to serve **Self** by greed, getting the bread-things of life. Or to tempt God by selfish pleasure. Or try to buy the world for **Self** by serving Satan. By nature we're always about serving **Self**. When tired and discouraged, we naturally ask: "Why me?" "What about me?" "What will I do?"

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, quotes are from a draft translation by the undersigned for the Wartburg Project – John.

<sup>2</sup> "The Sisterhood of Birth Mothers," by Heather Gims. *Life Issues Connector*, 2/2014, p.5. [www.adoptionprofessionals.net](http://www.adoptionprofessionals.net)

<sup>3</sup> "Contrasts – Last Words," by Theodore J. Hartwig. *Forward in Christ*, 2/2014, p.16. [www.wels.net/forwardinchrist](http://www.wels.net/forwardinchrist) .

That was the test when Jesus asked Philip, ***“Where should we buy bread for these people to eat?”*** ***He asked this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do.*** Philip looks to money. 200 denarii, eight months’ wages, would not be enough for 5,000 men, plus women and children – if they scoured all the tiny villages on the north shore. Peter’s brother Andrew has another idea, but says it’s impossible. Basically, borrow from the kids, but we’ll come up short anyway. Don’t you love the way Jesus ends the discussion. When we are out of resources, He’s ready to work a miracle. ***“Have the people sit down.”*** Before He breaks the bread, Jesus gives thanks. What a wonderful example for us to say our table prayers, thanking God who gives us food by miracles of nature in earth, water and seed. God alone can bless us by **Providing food** that metabolizes for healthy minds and bodies, not to serve **Self**, but God. Do not waste! Jesus sends each disciple with a basket to fill with leftovers after everyone is satisfied. **Providing food** by this miracle is how Jesus showed He is God who **Served God instead of Self**.

### ✠ **Ruling over nature (vv.15-21)**

Many admire Jesus’ selfless attitude. But He deserves far more than admiration from the crowds and his disciples. “Let’s see: He can heal the sick, raise the dead, feed us for free. Yes! Let’s make Jesus our king whether he likes it or not!” ***“Seeing they were going to come and make him a king by force”*** (6:15), ***“Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd.”*** (Matthew 14:22) Then ***“he withdrew again to the mountain by himself alone.”***

Jesus’ mission is not to conquer world hunger. He says, ***“The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me.”*** (Mark 14:7 NIV84) Can you see the priority? Jesus teaches that the one thing needful is God’s Word because it points to Jesus as our Savior. And God’s Word teaches us while caring for others to remember that more than anything else they need the Word of God. Teaching a man to fish does no good if he has no clue God made the fish, and God’s Son makes us fishers of men. God rescues people from a happy trip to hell.

It’s easy to be brave when the water is calm and the shore is close by. But send one of those storms from the hills onto Galilee’s lake 700 feet below sea level, and you’ve got a torrent tossed boat of frightened fishermen. Why does Jesus keep praying alone on the mountain when he can see the storm smashing their boat all night? Why does he leave us to pull so hard against the oars with all our strength for three or four miles when he can see we’re getting nowhere? Why terrify us by walking on the lake when we think He’s a ghost? Wherever you are, no matter how frightful and challenging your life, Jesus’ is voice so reassuring, ***“I AM. Stop being afraid.”*** But when Peter asks, ***“Lord, if it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water,”*** why does Jesus say, ***“Come,”*** even though he knows Peter will be sinking in a few seconds, fearful for the waves all around him? (Matthew 14:22-33)

Dear loved ones of our Lord, how else would we know what this truly means that **Jesus Served God instead of Self**? We can’t see him **Ruling over nature** without wind and waves. If you were never worried and afraid, how could you ever appreciate the sweet peace of God taking care of you and giving you a trusting heart? Jesus can still walk on water. He can still calm the storms of life. Jesus is still **Ruling over nature** from God’s right hand. When life is the worst, Jesus proves the best.

***Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught [Peter]. “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”*** (Matthew 14:31) After Jesus called to the others, ***“I AM. Stop being afraid,” they were willing to take him into the boat. In a moment the boat reached the shore where they were heading.*** (6:21)

So quickly the Lord will take our fear away and end our troubles too – at the last trumpet or in our time of grace. You can count on it because **Jesus Served God instead of Self**. He took away our guilt by His innocent death in our place. And while sacrificing His very **Self** for us, Jesus said: ***“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”*** (Luke 23:46) Let us commit ourselves, body and soul, to Jesus again this Lenten season. Follow Him calmly and quietly, fully trusting in God to keep all His promises. For every promise comes true in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.