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*Eat and Be Satisfied (Matthew 14:13-21)*  
*8/20/2017 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow*

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An American Christian went to Africa. Most of his time there was absolutely miserable. He visited a lot of small villages that really did not have most of the comforts he was used to. It was hot, and there was no air-conditioning. The food wasn't particularly good, and it didn't really agree with him. The whole time he was there, he was uncomfortable. It was frankly painful.

The misery of his trip ended suddenly, however, when a villager simply asked the American a question. The man was in one of these poor villages. He was quite thin because he clearly was too poor to buy food for multiple meals a day. But the man asked the American, "How often do you fast?"

The rest of the conversation really hit the American hard. Here he was, upset at the lack of comforts he was used to, and here this villager was, so poor that he couldn't eat whenever he wanted, and yet he actually chose at times hunger over eating every chance he got. The man was unable to be well fed and comfortable all the time, yet he still chose at times to prolong his hunger and discomfort. The villager said he did it to express his trust that God would provide for him. He did it to remind himself that he did not live on bread alone, but on the Word of God, as the Bible says. The American recognized his own ingratitude, and the rest of his trip in Africa, though still just as harsh, really didn't bother him like it did at first.

Today, as we look at Jesus' feeding the 5,000, God will prove to us, yet again, that he always has and always will provide for us. We can trust him. He has provided every good thing in our lives. He has provided eternal salvation through Jesus Christ. We can trust him and, as Christians, we do. In our Gospel lesson, we see that 1) God is simply a provider, 2) we will see sin's natural tendency to look away from God for our needs, and 3) we will see Jesus' gracious invitation to bring our needs to him. Today, God invites us to Eat and Be Satisfied.

The very first words of our gospel lesson show how our God is simply a provider. It's what he does. He can't help it. The first 13 verses of Matthew 14 tell us about Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist, and how he was killed by an unrepentant ruler and just on a whim. Can you imagine one of your own relatives being thrown in prison just because he stood up for what's right and then being beheaded just for a night's entertainment!? That's horrifying! It's disgusting! It's infuriating! And Jesus, as true man, is dealing with all these emotions.

So, naturally, he wants some time alone, away from the crowds to spend by himself and with his close friends, the 12 disciples. Nothing wrong with that. Our emotions are powerful and all of us need time to deal with the loss of a loved one.

But notice Jesus' reaction to the crowds that chase after him: he has compassion on them. He doesn't see them as a drain on his energy. He doesn't see them as opportunists who were just trying to get whatever they could out of him. He doesn't see them as

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undeserving sinners, even though all those things were true.

Instead, all Jesus sees is their need. They need something. And God, as a provider, just wants to fulfill those needs. Jesus sees their physical needs, the result of sin breaking this world, so that the bodies he created in the beginning now break down, get sick, and die, so Jesus heals their sick. Jesus sees their spiritual needs, that they are trapped in their own sinfulness and in Satan's lies, so he teaches them about God's kingdom and how he is taking back this broken world and fixing it through the gospel message; how one day, Judgment Day, everything will be made right.

God is a provider. He provides for people's needs. This is just what he does. He provides for you and me. He graciously gives us our daily necessities every single day. He gives us the ability to work, and think, and earn money. He provides us with a government that allows us to live in safety and security. He gives us hospitals and medical science to provide healing for our sicknesses. That was why he sent Jesus to save us from hell, because we had a need to escape that punishment which we deserve, so God provided for that need.

Sometimes you and I are kind of like that American in my story before. God is providing for all our needs and yet we are miserable because we demand that God give us more than we actually need. May God give us a mindset like that African villager who recognized that God is truly giving us all that we need. We need only trust him.

Back to our Gospel lesson, Jesus has been teaching and healing for a while now. It's starting to get late, and the disciples also see a need in the crowd. The people need to eat. And the disciples' solution: send the people away from Jesus. After all, they're in the desert: there's no food around. There's no possible way that God could feed his people in the desert, right? Wait, I just had *déjà vu*. Something about God feeding his people in the desert with bread from heaven... something called manna...

Never mind. There's no way God could feed his people when there's clearly no food around, right? Let's be realists! We gotta send the people away from Jesus. Sure, they got some good spiritual lessons, but now they have to get back to real life. Do you see the flaw in the disciples' thinking?

Satan loves this temptation. Yeah, Jesus is great, but now I've gotta get back to real life. It's great to get a spiritual lesson, Jesus, but you can't help me with *this*.

And so Christians sit through a church service on Sunday morning, and don't give God a second thought the rest of the week, because now they're back to real life. Or Christians don't have time for the Word of God because they've got so many "real" problems to deal with; because they think they do live on bread alone.

Even as we look at the state of the world, how evil the world seems to be, how the church seems to be shrinking, but instead of going to Jesus and learning his views on the subject, instead of learning more from God's Word and learning how to put his Word into practice in our daily lives, we think, "Our church just needs to do this new thing," or we say, "Those people over there aren't living their faith like they ought to!"

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For some of us, it gets darker. There's no way God can help us with our loneliness or our losses and regrets, or our guilt or our past, so people turn to addictions; alcohol, or pornography, or drugs, any number of other things. There's no way God can make our lives mean something, so people live their lives on autopilot, mindlessly throwing themselves into their work at the expense of their families, or spending their time in fantasy, chasing endless entertainment, just so they don't have to think about what's actually going on.

Satan even goes so far as to tell us that Jesus can't take care of our spiritual needs. We start to think, "There's no way God can forgive *my* sins," as if I were some kind of super sinner far beyond everyone else in the world. Or we look at our lives and see our sin, and instead of turning back to Jesus for help in turning from those sins, instead of recognizing that our sinful natures will cling to us until we reach heaven, instead of recognizing that we are in constant need of Jesus' forgiveness, we think, "I must not have tried hard enough," or "I must not have believed enough."

And by then, Satan has done the damage. He's gotten us to say, "We've got a problem. Better go away from Jesus." Satan wants us saying that about everything, because he knows that the path away from Jesus, *any* path away from Jesus leads straight to hell.

Back in our lesson, Jesus gives his disciples a little test. He tells them to give the crowds something to eat. They say, "Jesus, that's impossible! All we've got are 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish!"

It always amuses me how arrogant people can be. I'm reminded of the invention of the television and people who said back then, "It'll never catch on." How often do you and I say to ourselves or to other people, "That's impossible," when we really have no clue what we're talking about? Here the disciples are, after watching Jesus miraculously heal sick people, and they are telling Jesus that it's impossible.

When Jesus tells us to love our neighbor as ourselves, do we say, "That's impossible"? When Jesus tells us to turn the other cheek, do we list off all the reasons that makes no sense? When God speaks about how he wants us to serve others or to honor marriage or to be honest or to love our enemies, do we say, "No, Jesus, that just doesn't work nowadays"? If God has provided for us every time we have chosen our sinful ways over God's ways, do you think he will stop providing for us if we start living his way?

Jesus says to us, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well." Jesus tells us to make our number one priority securing our eternal life in heaven. Make your first priority to hear the gospel message of how Jesus already provided for that need! Jesus has saved you from your sins, from death, and from hell. Trust God that he has provided for your eternal needs. Trust God when he tells us that every sin is damnable and that our only option is to repent of our sins and turn back to him. Trust that God has provided for all of your spiritual needs. And then, know that all these physical needs will also be given to you. Trust that.

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Back in our Gospel lesson, after Jesus' disciples have proven to him that what he asks is impossible, Jesus gives them the solution they couldn't see. "Bring them to me," Jesus says. Jesus takes the food, gives thanks, and gives the food to his disciples and they actually do feed 5,000 people with that food, just like Jesus told them to. In fact, it might have been more like 10,000 or 15,000 because that was only the men they counted, not women or children! They thought it was impossible, but Jesus could do it.

Dear friends, whatever your needs are, bring them to Jesus. He can provide. He can show you the right way to pursue what you need. Bring your needs before your God because he is a provider. He is *the* Provider. He loves to provide for our needs.

Bring your loneliness to Jesus and find that he has given you a perfect relationship with God by removing your sins through Jesus' death and resurrection. More than that, he shows you in his Word what your relationships with other people are all about, that it is about you loving and serving them to God's glory rather than about them doing everything for you. And in this way you can find real and fulfilling relationships with other people!

Bring your needs for meaningful life pursuits to Jesus and find that he gives your every moment eternal significance as you learn to serve God and your neighbor with everything you do. Bring your cares and anxieties to Jesus and see how he has cared for you all of your life and he promises to care for you for all of eternity.

Bring your sin before Jesus and find full and free forgiveness for the whole world in his death on the cross. Bring your doubts before Jesus and see every promise and prophecy that he has fulfilled throughout history, so that you can be assured that he will fulfill his promises to you too.

Whatever you need, bring it to Jesus. If he could provide food in the desert for his people, he can certainly provide for you when you think it impossible. If God can provide for a poor villager in Africa to the point that the man was confident enough to actually skip some of the few meals he got, he can certainly provide for you even when you suffer. If Jesus could provide for your eternal welfare by dying on the cross to take away your sins, he can certainly provide for your daily needs while you live on this earth for just a few decades.

Bring your needs to Jesus. He has always provided for you and he always will. Bring your needs to Jesus. Then Eat and Be Satisfied. Amen.