

Matthew 14:13 – 33

^{14:13} Now when Jesus heard about John, he withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by himself; and when the people heard of this, they followed him on foot from the cities. ¹⁴ When he went ashore, he saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick. ¹⁵ When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, ‘This place is desolate and the hour is already late; so send the crowds away, that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.’ ¹⁶ But Jesus said to them, ‘They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat!’ ¹⁷ They said to him, ‘We have here only five loaves and two fish.’ ¹⁸ And he said, ‘Bring them here to me.’ ¹⁹ Ordering the people to sit down on the grass, he took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, he blessed the food, and breaking the loaves he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds, ²⁰ and they all ate and were satisfied. They picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve full baskets. ²¹ There were about five thousand men who ate, besides women and children. ²² Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, while he sent the crowds away. ²³ After he had sent the crowds away, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray; and when it was evening, he was there alone. ²⁴ But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. ²⁵ And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.’ ²⁸ Peter said to him, ‘Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.’ ²⁹ And he said, ‘Come!’ And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ ³¹ Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and took hold of him, and said to him, ‘You of little faith, why did you doubt?’ ³² When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. ³³ And those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘You are certainly God’s Son!’

Background

- King Herod has just killed John the Baptist because John challenged his marriage to his brother’s wife. John’s disciples have just found Jesus and told him (Mt.14:1 – 12). So Jesus might be grieving through the loss of his cousin, John the Baptist, and thinking about his own upcoming death.
- Five loaves and twelve baskets: Jesus is retelling King David’s story. In 1 Sam.21, David was being hunted in the wilderness by King Saul and his men. He went into the Tabernacle and took five of the twelve loaves of the holy bread (twelve loaves were set out according to Lev.24:5), and fed himself and his men with the bread. In John’s Gospel, the Jewish crowd seems to see a Davidic motif right away. ‘So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take him by force to make him king, withdrew again to the mountain by himself alone.’ (Jn.6:15) Later, Jesus refers to the number of leftover baskets: ‘Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets full you picked up? Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets full you picked up?’ (Mt.16:9 – 10) In Mark’s Gospel, the disciples answer the questions: ‘five’ and ‘seven.’ Jesus then says, ‘Do you not yet understand?’ (Mk.8:18 – 21)

Questions

1. Why might serving the five thousand people be a challenge at that moment to Jesus and the disciples?
 - a. The political challenge: a group that large could get caught by Herod
 - b. The emotional challenge: Jesus had just been grieving his cousin's death
 - c. The logistical challenge: how could you get enough food for them?
2. What are the challenges for us to doing ministry? Open brainstorm, reflection....
 - a. People may ask, 'But what about burning out?' The issue here is not that Jesus calls us to be constantly available (and get no sleep and flunk out of school), but that he wants to reach more and more people through us. The challenge is about how we see people.
3. How does Jesus look at the crowds? How did the disciples look at the crowds?
 - a. Jesus had *compassion* (v.14). The disciples probably felt conflicted. They tried to care, but they weren't in the paradigm of serving food to a crowd. They thought they were leading a different kind of movement.
4. What can we learn about ministry from the way Jesus handles the crowd?
 - a. Where does his sense of provision come from?
 - b. Where does his sense of compassion come from?
 - c. What is the 'bread' we are giving to others? 'Word' about Jesus. A taste of Jesus...
5. What was it like for the disciples during the miracle of the feeding, as it unfolded?
6. Each disciple got a basket full of bread at the end. What's the significance of that?
 - a. Jesus takes care of each disciple, even as they serve others. We are not cogs in Jesus' ministry machine. Jesus cares for us, and fills us as well.
 - i. Leader illustrate this
 - b. Jesus is exerting a claim on Israel, claiming to feed Israel, by the 12 baskets
 - c. Jesus is claiming to be king of Israel, since 5 and 12 are the numbers of loaves of bread involved in the King David story; see 1 Sam.21.
 - i. Illus: Jesus retelling David's story is like Aragorn retelling Isildur's story. Centuries ago, Isildur had betrayed humanity by snatching the One Ring, rather than throwing it into Mount Doom to be destroyed. Centuries went by, and the race of humanity was fractured. This is the situation that Aragorn steps into. In the first book, he protects Frodo and withstands the greatest of temptations. He doesn't snatch the Ring of Power and shows himself worthy of being the heir to the throne, even superior to his ancestors. He shows himself worthy again when he and Theoden King of Rohan and only a few men are trapped by orcs at Helm's Deep. Theoden asks the question, 'What do you against such hate?' Aragorn says his now famous, 'Ride out to meet them.' In the third book, he will go to Gondor, bring hope there, heal those wounded in battle, and lead the forces against Sauron's army. Slowly you start to see Aragorn regather the race of humanity around himself. He unites them. Aragorn's story redeems and retells Isildur's story.
 - ii. Adam betrayed humanity by snatching what was forbidden. The race of humanity fractured. David was supposed to be a 'second Adam,' but he also took what was forbidden and his house fractured. Jesus came and did not snatch power. He withstands the temptations all his ancestors fell into. He is the true David, the true Adam. In his own physical body, he heals human nature and shares with us his new humanity, to heal the thing in us that went wrong. He will retell our stories too.
7. Why does Jesus send the crowd away quickly, separating the disciples from them?
 - a. If the disciples discussed the 'king' significance of this miracle, the crowds would go nuts. Herod was already paranoid.
 - b. The disciples needed some rest, the crowds did need to go home?
 - c. Jesus still wanted to pray and grieve?
8. Why does Jesus walk on water to them?
 - a. It was the fastest route to them
 - b. Does it symbolize something? In what ways had they already been 'battered by the waves'? In what ways was it true that the 'wind was contrary'? The Pharisees were becoming more oppositional throughout Mt.11 – 13. And Herod was starting to come after them in Mt.14:1 – 12. In the face of these difficulties, they just did a very risky, public miracle. But they had 'walked above it.'

- c. How is it a supernatural thing for you to serve others and advance the kingdom when you're stressed and persecuted?
 - d. Illus: When my daughter Zoe was 16 months old, I was carrying her down some stairs at a friend's place. I was heading into his basement. Unfortunately, at the bottom of the stairs, there was a large rug rolled up. I stepped on it with my right foot, and it started to roll. Because it was the last step, all my weight was on my right foot, and I started to twist my ankle. It's funny how time slowed down because a few thoughts ran through my head: 'Hmmm...normally I would protect my ankle, just turn to the right and fall onto my side with my hands down. But I can't let go of Zoe. So I'll just hold onto her, and let all my weight fall on my ankle.' I heard a shark crack from my ankle and I felt the pain, and wow did it hurt! I wound up spraining my ankle pretty badly, and tearing a ligament. The pain didn't go away for a year, and my doctor afterwards said, 'No more basketball or running for you.' Now I'm bummed that it all happened, but given that it happened, I'm actually really glad that Zoe wasn't hurt at all. It had been my prayer since my junior year of college that the Lord would make me less selfish and more of a vessel of His love. It struck me that He had done something in me so that my first thought when I sprained my ankle wasn't for myself and my own self-preservation; it was for someone else – in this case my little girl. The miracle was that Jesus had changed me and is still changing me to serve him and others. The small lessons we learn and small prayers we pray build in us the life of Jesus so that in clutch moments, when perhaps other people's lives and well being actually depend on it, we can make the godly choice.
9. Why does Peter want to get out of the boat, too? He wants to do what comes supernaturally... But they've already done something supernatural: serve the crowds with compassion in a time of stress and opposition. Maybe Jesus wants to interpret the previous miracle of multiplying the bread by allowing Peter to walk on water. He's saying, 'Peter, you've already walked on water, really. Oh, and don't doubt. Just stay focused on me.' It's probably why these two episodes go back to back.
10. So who fed the five thousand +? And who walked on water? Both Jesus and the disciples (Simon Peter in the latter case). This is the great theme of **participation with Jesus!**
- a. Did the disciples get this involved with Jesus before? No. Jesus had sent them out to proclaim the kingdom and heal the sick back in Mt.11:2. But this was the first time they were doing something so intimately with Jesus to serve people.
 - b. Much of the time, we think that God's role and our role are mutually exclusive. 'Is it God's role or our role?' But there, Jesus acts in such a way that he makes space for our role under his. We participate in what he's doing.
 - c. And as we serve with him, he discloses more of his true identity and authority to us. The disciples get to see Jesus make a claim to be the heir of David, and that will continue to unfold. We get to see Jesus at work in other people, showing that he is the true king of humanity.