

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours in abundance through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, dear Christian friends. “I’m starving!” How many parents have heard their children yell this? I know that I’ve probably driven my mom crazy telling her that I am hungry time and time again. As I grew, it seemed that there wasn’t anything that could keep me full for an entire hour. A kid needs nutrients to help their body grow tall and strong. Food isn’t just important for growing children, but also for everyone as well, right? We need food to keep us going for the day and to give us the nutrients that we need. In today’s gospel, there was a large group of 5000 people before Jesus who were starving.

But as we can see from how long they spent with our Savior, the crowd was starving for more than food. That is why there is this large group of people before Jesus who came from the surrounding towns and villages. As the day drew on, we see that the disciples were concerned because they didn’t have the means to feed this many people. John’s gospel tells us the food they found was from a boy. This meal was only five loaves of bread and two fish. This meal could feed that single boy for lunch and maybe supper. But this is just for one boy. Now imagine feeding tons of people. If you think about it, there were 5000 men. If almost every man had a wife and some even had children, you are probably looking at around 10,000 mouths to feed. This is about the size of Verona. Can you image such a large crowd! Now, how are they going to be fed!?! No one could possibly afford from their own pocket this much food. When Jesus saw so many starving people, he had compassion on them.

The word here for compassion is a fascinating word. Please excuse my nerdiness of just a moment. The verb comes from the word for the inner organs, like the spleen and kidney. So, it could be understood that all of Jesus’s insides felt for the people. When we see a tragic scene, like a horrible car crash or the death of a small child, some say that they feel so bad for them that their heart hurts or they felt it in their soul. This is how Jesus felt for the people. Our Savior then healed their sick and did not want to send them away. Jesus performed this miraculous feeding so that the starving people were fed.

But compassion is just a feeling. Did Jesus just feel bad for them, or will he do something? When someone makes an outrageous claim, what do we say? Actions speak louder than words. If I were to tell you that I could do a hand stand for 24 hours straight, you would want me to prove it. I can tell you now that I cannot do a stand for even 24 seconds. If Scripture were to leave it at the statement, “Jesus had compassion on them,” I don’t know if that would mean much to us. But Jesus felt so bad for these people that he remained and healed their sick and even fed them. He did this great miracle for these people, and that demonstrated two things: (1) that Jesus is God and (2) he cares for his people. Only God is able to do something like that. God isn’t inactive; he doesn’t just sit on the sidelines. He acts on his compassion. What great lengths Jesus went through to take care of so many people’s physical needs!

Jesus also cares for our needs; he has compassion on us. Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord’s prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread.” He also tells us not worry what tomorrow will bring because we are worth more than a sparrow, but God takes care of them, so he will take care of us. Even the hairs on our head are numbered. Jesus even tells us that God causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the evil. But it doesn’t always

seem that way, does it? We see people who are starving on the streets. Natural disasters cause destruction, leaving people without house and food. And there are diseases that take away people's health. Seeing these things, it causes us to doubt. "If God is all powerful and if God really cares, he would take all the bad things away." "If Jesus was wrong about being with me always, what else is he wrong about." We worry and are stressed out. Our worry comes before our trust in God.

But when we doubt, Jesus's has compassion on us. He doesn't turn a blind eye to us when it seems to us that he doesn't care. His greatest demonstration of compassion is that he suffered on the cross for you and for me. Our greatest need was that we needed saving from eternal death and separation from God that we earned by not trusting in him to take care of our most basic needs. But God has forgiven us because when he sees you, he sees his perfect Son who died in our place.

Since God was able to take care of our most powerful enemy, death, just as he promised, we can have certainty that he will take care of us on this earth as he promised. When Jesus encourages us to pray in the prayer he taught us, "give us this day our daily bread," he didn't do this just because. He listens to our prayers and answers with exactly what we need. His answer to our prayers might not come the way we expect, but he answers prayer. When we are hurting or in need, he provides. He puts people in our lives. We have friends who stand up for us, fellow Christians to talk to, and even organizations whose sole purpose is to help in times of need. Jesus doesn't just have compassion, but he acts on it.

When you are hungry, it is not a great feeling, is it? When your stomach rumbles, not only is it a little embarrassing when someone can hear it, but you feel terrible. You cannot focus on anything except food. There are bad side affects to being underfed. Your body is not getting what it needs to survive. Our souls, like our bodies, get hungry, too. Our souls need the life saving nutrients of the gospel, the news that Jesus lived, died, and rose for us. This great news feeds our souls.

The crowd of 5000 before Jesus were starving, not just for the physical food, but also spiritual food. It was dire because they needed the sweet nutrients of the gospel, or they would die. Saint Mark records for us that Jesus saw the crowds and had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

The picture of sheep is common throughout Scripture. I have gotten to spend some time with sheep. One of my friends in high school raised sheep. Just looking at them, I could tell you that these animals are helpless. If a predator were to get inside of their pen, they would be done for. They required a lot of watching after and taking care of. He had to care for them at all times every day. Back in Jesus day, the shepherds would be in open fields, continuously moving to find food. The shepherds would have to fend off the sheep from predators like wolves and bears. On top of that, the shepherd had to lead the sheep. If they weren't led by a shepherd, they would wander, they could even walk off a cliff.

We can be like the crowd of 5000, harassed and helpless. Our shepherd, Jesus, holds out the food that we need for our souls. In church, we have several Bible classes throughout the

week, different times to worship, Sunday School, and even devotions posted online. On top of that, we have the opportunity to read and learn the Bible at home by ourselves and with our family. What a blessing it is that God gives us so many opportunities to be fed! But, it can be too easy to dismiss these opportunities because we are “too busy.” I know that when my calendar tells me that it’s time for Bible class, at times, a groan slips from my lips. Sometimes we want to tell God that we just aren’t able to hear his Word today. When we do that, it is like telling God that we don’t need to eat. We are denying our souls what they need. Would you skip a meal? I am very careful that I eat at least four times a day? Yet, how intentional are we to get the life saving nutrients of the gospel?

But Jesus, our Good Shepherd, gathers us to the fold. He has compassion on us, the starving sheep whose souls salivate for the good news of salvation. He gives us his Word and makes sure we hear it. He brings to us people who share his Word: pastors and friends. He gives us time to read the Bible on our own. Since the virus has happened, I have been able to hear his Word so often because pastors have taken initiative to post on social media to share this life-giving message. In his Word, he gently takes us and leads us back to his fold. He feeds us with the knowledge that by his death, death has been done away with. We are reassured of this by seeing the account of his victorious rising on that first Easter Sunday. Our shepherd has compassion on each one of his wandering sheep. Just as he shared many things about the kingdom of God with those who were there for the miraculous feeding, he feeds us with the good news that heaven is ours because Jesus died and rose. This good news isn’t taken away because of those times we grumble about hearing the good news rather than rejoicing. We hear time and time again that our sins are forgiven.

Notice how even when every had their share, there were so many left overs that twelve baskets were filled. Just as Jesus provided an abundance for the 5000, he provides such an abundance for us. God has shown great compassion on us in feeding both our bodies and our souls. Because of this, we now have an opportunity to share with others. God has lavished so much love on us, sharing with us the most amazing news that Christ has so much compassion for us that he died for us. We get to share that great news with others. When we see people, who are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd, we get to share from our abundance. God uses us to help people’s bodies and souls. For those harassed by false teachers, we get to share the truth. For those helpless, without means of income or injured, we get to provide a helping hand. For some people, we are how Jesus acts on his compassion for the starving people of this world. He uses us. What a blessing that is!

Are you starving? All of this food talk may leave your stomachs feeling hungry, but God has given this opportunity now for our souls to be fed. We heard how Jesus has compassion on us, his starving sheep. He feeds both our bodies and souls. He makes sure that we are well feed, just like the crowd of 5000. He gives us more than what we need, so we have the opportunity to share with others. God will continue to feed your soul all the way until eternal life with him. Hold on to the confidence that this promise gives. Amen.