

Sermon #1,276: Mark 8:1-9 (Historic Gospel)
7-30-17 (Trinity 7), Bethany-Princeton MN

THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST

Prayer: Lord God, heavenly Father, in the wilderness by Your Son You abundantly fed 4,000 men, besides women and children, with seven loaves and a few small fish: We implore You, with grace to abide among us with Your blessing. Keep us from coveting and from cares of this life, that we may seek first Your kingdom and Your righteousness, and in all things needed for body and soul to experience Your ever-present help; through Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (*Collect by V. Dietrich*)

Sermon Text, Mark 8:1-9 (v. 2a). ² **"I have compassion on the multitude."** Lord, this is Your Word and these are Your Words. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. Give us hearts that receive Your word of truth by so that our faith may not fail. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ, who has compassion for all:

This miracle confronts us with the attributes of God, as all Christ's miracles do. The divine attributes are characteristics or qualities that God has. However, these are not "parts" of God. God is not divided up. In the Augsburg Confession, we confess that God is "*without parts.*" At the same time we say He is "*of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness,*" which are attributes. They are ways of describing what He is like in His essence.

In catechism instruction we learn what some of the chief attributes, or characteristics of God, are: He is infinite (having no end). He is eternal (without beginning or end). He is unchangeable. He is omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnipresent (in every location). He is all-wise. With regard to God's will, He is holy and perfect, just and right, full of mercy (pity and compassion), showing grace (undeserved love), true and faithful (keeping His word), and ever patient.

The attributes of God come up in connection with Christ's miracles. In the miracles these attributes – which are invisible – are seen in Jesus. A chief reason for every miracle Jesus performs is to demonstrate that He is God. It was clear to everyone that Jesus was a true man, the son of Mary. The miracles show that He is also true God.

The Bible verse, *“For in Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9)*, says that in His body – which people saw outwardly – the true God dwelt inwardly. He wasn’t part God, part man; but fully God and fully man. The way this worked is that – in order to actually save us – from the time He was conceived in Mary’s womb, the Son of God humbled Himself. Although He still was God, He did not fully use the properties of His nature as God. He laid aside the full use of His divine nature. So these attributes that He possessed as God were hardly ever seen. In His miracles, Jesus showed a faint glimmer of His reality as God.

So how about it? Which divine attributes would you emphasize from His miracle of feeding the crowd of 4,000 men plus women and children?

Perhaps we would notice His omnipotence – that making just seven loaves and a few fish the size of sunnies into a meal for thousands shows that He has power to do anything. His power arrests our attention!

Perhaps we would notice His omniscience – that He knows all things, He even knew their hunger before they did and knew that without food right now they would die on the way home. He knows everything!

Or perhaps we would notice His wisdom in this scene, or His holiness and perfection, or that He is just and right and nothing was lacking or wrong in anything He did here. All His ways are right! How refreshing!

But noticing these attributes of God would actually lead you farther away from God than closer to Him. Although Jesus is definitely using these attributes in this miracle – His omnipotence, omniscience, etc. – they are actually not at the heart of what He is doing here.

This is the mistake that many people make. They think God’s glory and majesty are what define Him. It’s the mistake we make too. The Christian religion is not about the greatness of God ; it is about the grace of God. If you, a sinner, approach God in His glory, you will find that it will only destroy and obliterate you. It shows our arrogance that we think we can approach God casually and treat Him as an equal. On our own we can’t take comfort in God’s power; it is a function of His Law that thunders at us. On our own we can’t take comfort in God knowing everything, for He knows all our sins, everything we hide.

The flip side of this is that when we do come to know our sinfulness, we respond by falling into despair. This is what we see in the gospel of the great catch of fish, when Peter fell down and said, "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!*" The shepherds in the Christmas gospel too were not glad to see the glorious angel but responded by being sore afraid.

So when we see such attributes in Jesus' miracles, His power and glory as God, these do not save. This is not what Jesus wants people to see. He wants this only to be the beginning. He wants them to see a glimpse of His glory as God so that His power will humble them and they will ask: "*What shall I, frail man, be pleading?*" (ELH 537:3)

Jesus makes it no secret which attribute of God He wants you to see. It is His compassion. He says, out loud for His disciples to hear: "**I have compassion on the multitude ...**"

Let's talk about compassion. Like the word *sympathy*, it means "to suffer with." Compassion is something we associate with human experience. Truly that is a part of this; it's there in the word that St. Mark uses. This word "having compassion" really says Jesus "felt it in His insides." God doesn't have insides like ours, or a stomach that gets twisted in knots. But it is saying here that Jesus literally ached, he felt it in His viscera, His intestines. Did you know Jesus had intestines? If He had a human body He must have, but we don't like to dwell on this. It's kind of an eww. Jesus literally ached, in His physical human anatomy. This shows what He did in His human nature being shared fully by His nature as God.

This is how God chooses to express His love. He doesn't keep it distant and above us. But that's the point. This compassion does not begin on earth. It begins in heaven. Compassion begins with God. It is part of His nature and essence. It is a feature of His mercy that is just beautiful. God sends His Son to bring His compassion into this world, so that He literally aches and hurts on His human insides while He dwells among us. The compassion in Jesus' divine nature is joined with His human body parts.

This is true compassion. It's important to hear that He has this compassion for us. What's different in this feeding of the 4,000 is that it isn't said about Jesus. Jesus Himself says it: "**I have compassion on the multi-**

tude." First words He says. This is what He came, from the bosom of the Father, to declare. He is describing what God is like.

But even more importantly, this is what God is like *for you*. He brings this compassion with Him into the world, but not just the world in general. It's to every person. It's for all people. He declares this compassion is "**upon**" - comes to - "**the multitude**" there in that wilderness.

At this time Jesus was in a region called the Decapolis ("Ten Cities) that was populated by more Gentiles than Jews. In the earlier miracle of feeding the 5,000, the restless multitude wanted to make Jesus a king, to realize their hopes for a warlike Messiah and end Jewish suffering at the hands of Rome. But this crowd is different. They are Gentiles. What Jesus teaches is all new to them. They drink it in, so much that they just stay there for three days listening, ignoring **their stomach's needs, even though they are (in the disciples' words) "in the wilderness."**

So this crowd represents the whole world, Jews and Gentiles alike, people of every nation, who in this world are living in a wilderness of sin. This multitude includes you. You live in a wilderness here. We don't wake up thinking that it's a wilderness, but it is. It's filled with sin. It's filled with your sins and your guilt and lack of inner peace. It's filled with the sins others do to you. It's filled with so much that's wrong, so many worries, so many fears, job and money worries, dangers for our children, dangers for our health, things we don't like about our job, complaints about the government, and all the catastrophes we don't understand, things that happen to us or to our family members that we are just unhappy about. Where is contentment to be found?

To you Jesus says: "**I have compassion on the multitude ...**" on you! He came down not only to do God's compassion but to speak His compassion upon us and over us. He places His compassion upon you. All your troubles, all your worries, all your sin and guilt, for all that's wrong Jesus says to you: "I have compassion on you." This is the attribute of God that He wants you to see is present in Him, and it is available to you. He brings it right to you! In His Word He speaks it to you; the whole Bible has one purpose, and that is for His compassion for sinners to be known by you. Baptism is all compassion: He doesn't leave a helpless baby on

the outside looking in but comes – as He did to you in your baptism – and cradles you in His arms, makes you His child, and washes away your sin. In the Lord’s Supper, His compassion comes right into you as you eat His body and drink His blood for the forgiveness of your sins.

All Jesus has for you in His Church is His compassion! You need never wonder how He feels about you. **“I have compassion”** for you, He says! If you need to hear it again, He’ll say it again! If you ever wonder, if you are troubled, if you are filled with doubts, come to me as your pastor and I will tell you what Jesus orders me to tell you: that He has only compassion for you.

This also opens up the other attributes of God so that they are not scary. If He has compassion for you – and He does! – then His almighty power is for your good and you can be confident that He will protect you and watch over you and do for you whatever He knows you need.

If He has compassion for you – and He does! – then He knows everything about you, not to shake His finger at you but to beckon you toward Him and say: “I already know those things you’ve done, now what you need to know is that I paid for them fully on the cross and they are no more. Come, feel My compassion for you.”

This is what His Church is, the fellowship of His compassion. Amen!