

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

We're finished with Jesus' parables for the moment. The last three Sundays, Jesus taught us with these inspired stories conveying divine truths and with their explanations. Jesus was a master teacher. He astonished the crowds with "*his teaching*." He taught "*them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes*" (Matt. 7:28-29). He astonishes us still.

He astonishes us again today, this time not with His teaching but with His power. And we marvel at the "why."

Both Jesus' humanity and His divinity are on display in today's Gospel. The lesson begins with Jesus withdrawing "*to a desolate place*." He wanted to be alone. He was grieving. He had just heard of the gruesome death of His cousin John the Baptist. So He got into a boat to get away from the crowds.

They were not having it. They hustled on foot to where Jesus was going and were there waiting for Him when He arrived. Getting out of the boat, Jesus did not dismiss them or ignore their needs, but began healing their sick.

About the healing, that's it! There was no description of how it happened. Were people coming up and touching His garment (Matt. 14:36)? Did He touch them (Matt. 9:28-30)? Did He simply speak a word and it was so (Matt. 9:6-7)? It doesn't matter. Regardless of the mechanics of Jesus' healing, He did it with divine power. By these signs, Jesus shows not just that He was "*a teacher come from God*," not just that "*God [was] with him*" (John 3:2), but that He was very God Himself.

Similarly with regard to the feeding of the 5000, as we call it. With this sign, Matthew supplies much more detail. It was late in the day. No doubt the people were hungry. "Send them away," the disciples told Jesus. "No, you feed them," He replied. "*We have only five loaves here and two fish*." "What is that for so many?" "*Bring them here to me*."

You know the account. Jesus had the people sit down. He took the bread and fish, looked up to heaven, blessed them, broke them, and gave them to the disciples to distribute. Everyone ate to their full. And at the end, there were twelve baskets full of leftovers. Did the people recognize this mighty wonder? Matthew doesn't say, but the disciples did, and Matthew includes it in the Gospel.

Again, these miracles — healing the sick and feeding the multitudes — bear witness to Jesus' divine power. He is true God. Who else can declare away sickness; who else can command the elements and have them obey; who but the Creator, the One "*by whom all things were made*" (John 1:3)? What are described are Divine miracles; no one surely would dispute that — although, today many would dispute whether they really happened. But we don't really care about their

impious opinions. We take the Bible at its word, and everyone can agree: no mere mortal can do such things—only God can.

But why does He do these mighty signs? It's not to show off. These are not frivolous uses of divine power. I never saw the movie "Bruce Almighty." I don't really know what the plot is, except that it's an irreverent comedy. God, played by Morgan Freeman, grants a fellow named Bruce, played by Jim Carrey, divine powers for one week. The trailer asks the questions, "If you could be God for one week, what would you do? Who would you help? How would you handle ... the most powerful responsibility in the universe?" Then it shows Bruce Almighty with the flick of a hand opening a fire hydrant for kids to play in; it shows Bruce tiptoeing across some large body of water; it shows him lighting an array of candles by saying, "Let there be light" and blowing out electric lights like you'd blow out a candle; etc.; all irreverent displays of extraordinary powers granted him by God. Okay. It's a comedy. They were having a little fun.

But you know: that's not Jesus. You know that from your catechism. We teach about Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, there; we teach about Him in His "state of humiliation" and His "state of exaltation." This is how the newest catechism defines that state of humiliation: "As man, Christ did not always or fully use or manifest the divine powers and majesty that were communicated to His human nature" (*Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, 2017, q. 170, p. 183). His divine powers were not always on display. Nor did He use them to serve Himself, but us.

Thus, we hear today why Jesus did these miraculous signs. Matthew says, as Jesus gets off the boat and sees the crowd: "*he had compassion on them.*" That's who our God is. Even as we pray to "Almighty God," we acknowledge that His "almighty power is made known — manifested — chiefly in showing mercy and pity" (Collect for Proper 27C, *Lutheran Service Book*). Compassion — mercy and pity — are divine attributes.

Jesus is full of divine *σπλαγχνον*. That's the noun form of the verb used here and is translated "*compassion.*" The verb *σπλαγχνιζομαι* means to "have pity or feel sympathy" (*BDAG*, 762), "to feel compassion" (*Liddell Scott*). But it's more than just a feeling or emotion. It's "a Messianic characterization of Jesus," says one author (Köster, *TDNT*, VII: 554), and this divine attribute manifests itself in action, in mercy, today in healing and in feeding.

Isn't this just extraordinary? Remember, Jesus is God. We are not; we're creatures. And yet, He has compassion on us. Don't you wonder with the Psalmist: "*O LORD, our Lord ... When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him*" (Ps. 8:1, 4)?

Why not just send the people away, as the disciples wanted? But Jesus couldn't. His divine *σπλαγγνον* moved Him to action then, and it still does today. Still today, He along with the Father give to us what we “need to support this body and life,” not because of “any merit or worthiness” in us — we're wretched sinners, but out of His “divine goodness and mercy,” because of His compassion and pity, because of His *σπλαγγνον*. God grant that we might “realize this and ... receive” such “daily bread” gifts “with thanksgiving” (*Small Catechism*, Lord's Prayer, 4th Petition). It's our duty.

But Jesus' *σπλαγγνον* was directed at more than just our mortal bodies “here in time.” He loved us body and soul that we might live forever with Him also “there in eternity.” The Father's divine *σπλαγγνον* was expressed in eternity as He chose us in Christ Jesus. Then at just the right time, He sent His Son into our flesh, “*born of woman, born under the law, to redeem [us] who were under the law*” (Gal. 4:4-5). With divine *σπλαγγνον* Jesus endured every temptation just as we are tempted, yet, unlike us, He remained “*without sin*” (Heb. 4:14-15). He was completely obedient to the Law, and by this “*man's obedience the many [have been] made righteous*” (Rom. 5:19), for bearing our disobedience upon His body, He was lifted up unto death (1 Pet. 2:24), offering Himself as the perfect sacrificial lamb, the lamb without blemish (1 Pet. 1:19), and He became our Savior who rescues us from the throes of sin and condemnation.

Of this great compassion Luther wrote in his well-known hymn, Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice (LSB556): “4. But God had seen my wretched state Before the world's foundation, And mindful of His mercies great [divine mercy is an expression of divine *σπλαγγνον*], He planned for my salvation. He turned to me a father's heart [there's divine *σπλαγγνον*]; He did not choose the easy part But gave His dearest treasure.

“5. God said to His beloved Son: ‘It's time to have compassion [more *σπλαγγνον*]. Then go, bright jewel of My crown, And bring to all salvation. From sin and sorrow set them free; Slay bitter death for them that they May live with You forever.’”

God grant that we may realize this, too, this great divine compassion of our God and Savior manifest in divine healing power. God grant that we may receive with thanksgiving the gracious miracle of His Supper today in which He distributes His bountiful goodness, our forgiveness and life and salvation. God grant us lips to sing: “*Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples! Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works*” (Ps. 105:1-2) — wondrous works done in service of His divine compassion.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.