

## **This Little Light: The Compassion of Christ, Illuminated**

1. Warm-up question: We just celebrated Thanksgiving. What's your favorite holiday of the year, and why is that your favorite?
2. Hopefully you feasted on Thanksgiving and ate till you could eat no more. ☺ That's what happened in our Gospel story this week; Jesus served up a meal that fed more than 5,000 till they could eat no more, with leftovers to spare. Let's read Matthew 14:13-21, as printed on p. 3.
  - a. Right before today's story, Jesus' cousin (John the Baptist) was beheaded by King Herod. Stunned by this news, Jesus wanted to get away for some quiet time. But when he came to shore, he saw a large crowd that wanted him to minister to them. Think about a moment in your life when you just needed to get away, but somebody needed you even more. How did you feel in that moment?
  - b. Amazingly, when Jesus saw the crowd of 5,000+, instead of being exasperated or overwhelmed, "he had compassion on them and healed their sick." The disciples had a different perspective. As evening approached, they urged Jesus to send the people away to find food. The disciples' recommendation was rational. What were some of the rational reasons for sending the crowd away to find food?
  - c. On Sunday, Jordan said, "The disciples saw the task, Jesus saw the people." If we were to compare what Jesus was thinking and feeling when he saw the crowd of 5,000 compared to what the disciples were thinking and feeling, what would be the difference? What might Jesus have been thinking and feeling? And what might the disciples have been thinking and feeling? Do you think you would have reacted more like Jesus or more like the disciples?
3. Jordan summed it up this way, "The Disciples leaned on cerebral/analytical thinking – looking for a formula; Jesus leaned on the Divine. The Disciples used critical thinking, their brains, to come up with a solution." But that can often be problematic. As an anonymous person once said, "We are not bodies with souls, we are souls with bodies." Jordan added, "We are not minds with souls, we are souls with minds."
  - a. What's the point? What's the difference?
  - b. Our brain knows stuff that our soul doesn't, but the reverse is also true. Our soul knows stuff that our brain doesn't. When making important decisions, how should a person of faith balance what is reasonable to the brain with what is possible with God? Should faith always trump reason? If not, under what circumstances should faith trump reason?
  - c. Tell us about a time in your own life when reason told you to do one thing, but the intuition of your soul told you to do another. Which way did you go? What happened?

4. We often find ourselves in places in life when what we have (five loaves and two fish) seems inadequate to meet the demands of the moment. In those situations, we should do what Jesus did in our story and see where it leads. Jesus took what little he had and gave thanks for it. That, in turn, created a virtuous cycle that Jordan described like this, “Gratitude becomes trust, trust becomes faith, faith becomes obedience, and obedience calls for compassion.” Given all we’d discussed the last couple weeks about how our brains work (40,000+ negative thoughts per day, and the limitations of rational thought), why is thanksgiving a critical first step in expanding our understanding of what’s possible in any given situation? Why are gratitude and thanksgiving essential precursors to acts of great compassion?
  
5. The story of Jesus feeding the crowd is told in all four Gospels. Three of the four Gospels say the disciples distributed the food to the people. John’s Gospel says Jesus distributed it. Both are true; both Jesus and the disciples participated in the distribution – the point being, we are called to act in collaborative partnership with Jesus. Jordan reminded us, “We are the hands and feet and eyes of Jesus. We are God’s plan for showing compassion to the world. There is no Plan B. Following Jesus is not a spectator sport.”
  - a. Do you want to be the hands and feet of Jesus? Our reflexive reaction is to say, “Yes!” because we know that’s the “right” answer. But deciding to be the hands and feet of Jesus is a big step. What are some reasons to hesitate? What are some reasons to take the plunge?
  
  - b. Jordan suggested three steps that can help us live more fully into our calling to be the hands and feet of Jesus. First, be intentional. Get up in the morning and say, “I am going to bless someone today; I will show compassion.” Second, look for every opportunity. Third, when an opportunity presents itself, instead of letting your brain talk you out of it, just do it! In the process, you’ll create new neuropathways in your brain that default toward compassion instead of caution. What do you think of these three steps? Which of the three steps is hardest for you – and why?
  
  - c. Looking back on this past week, tell us about a time you had an opportunity to show compassion in some way large or small. What did you do? Did you meet the moment? If so, how did it feel? If not, how did it feel?
  
  - d. Our brains want us comfortable. But in most places throughout the Bible, the Holy Spirit does not lead people into comfort. The Spirit leads us to transformation, which means change, and change is difficult. But Spirit-led change is also beautiful and powerful. Jordan ended his sermon with examples of beautiful acts of compassion. Let’s end our conversation the same way, so as to remind ourselves of what God can do through willing hearts. Tell us about a beautiful act of Christ-like compassion you have experienced or witnessed recently or in the past.

## **Matthew 14:13-21**

13 When Jesus heard what had happened [to John the Baptist], he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. 14 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

15 As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.” 16 Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

17 “We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered. 18 “Bring them here to me,” he said. 19 And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people.

20 They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. 21 The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children!