

You Do Not Need to Go Away

Matthew 14:13-21

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, August 6, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

You may have heard from some that Jesus withdrew by Himself after hearing about the execution of John, the Baptist, because Jesus was afraid that Herod might do the same thing to Him that he had done to John. But John and Jesus were related. Jesus could have been withdrawing to a desolate place by Himself out of grief. You have grieved. When you grieve sometimes you simply like to be by yourself.

But that does put them in a desolate place. When the crowds come Jesus has compassion on them. He heals the sick. And they are in a desolate place. When evening comes and the disciples ask Jesus to dismiss the crowds because it is getting late, that request is the most natural thing in the world. Of course the people need to go away into the villages and buy food. If they stay there, they will be hungry.

What Jesus says is what does not make any sense. He says to the disciples, "They do not need to go away."

Oh really, Jesus. They don't need to eat? They have some lunch stashed in their clothing? All of them having something to eat? It looks like we are pushing 20 000 people out here. Anybody bothered to check how many people are here? They can just stay up all night and get going in the morning without food? What do you mean they do not need to go away?

Of course they do not need to go away. Jesus looks up into heaven, blesses the food, breaks it and gives it to the disciples to distribute. They feed five thousand men, plus women and children that day. They did not need to go away.

And so it is with Jesus. If Jesus cannot perform miracles then what the disciples say makes sense. The people need to go away. Jesus needs to dismiss them. But if Jesus can perform miracles, then they do not need to go away.

And so it is with Jesus.

There are some who try to get by without a supernatural Jesus. There are some who try to say that Jesus was not a supernatural person. They try to say that Jesus was natural. They say that He was a country preacher from Galilee who said some brilliant things.

Some try to give natural explanations to the miracles that the Gospels record. Some say that Jesus was a faith healer who worked people into an emotional frenzy in order to fool them into thinking that they had been healed. Some say that Jesus made use of psychosomatic responses in the human body in order to convince people to believe that they had been healed and maybe in a few isolated cases they were healed.

It is harder for such people to try to explain miracles like the one recorded for us today. It is also hard for them to explain miracles like Jesus walking on the water. That is when most of these people turn and attack the character of the apostles. They will say that the apostles hallucinated implying that they were high on something. They will imply that the apostles were under emotional duress. They will use these explanations to say that the apostles were not reliable witnesses of the events that they claim they saw. That will work on some miracles like walking on the water. But it does not really effectively explain the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand.

Some will then simply say that the apostles were ancient people who saw things in a superstitious way. Something odd may have happened that they interpreted as a miracle. But with the

feeding of the five thousand I think if you are going to give a naturalistic explanation of Jesus, you need to simply say that the apostles were lying. There may have been several motivations for them to lie. They wanted Jesus' ministry to be a success so they lied about His resurrection and His other miracles. They told people that Jesus had ascended to the Father so there is only their word to go on when it comes to the miracles of Jesus. Matthew does not list any of the names of the five thousand people who were there so that a person could go and ask them if it were true.

Some people content themselves with this kind of Jesus. They are content with a natural Jesus who performs no miracles. When such people enter into the wilderness, they have no one there to help. They must leave the wilderness or they will die. They must leave Jesus because there is no reason to stay and there is plenty of wilderness which they must face.

If Jesus were a natural preacher from Galilee, then He is of no more help to us than Abraham Lincoln, Socrates, or Hammurabi or Cicero. Their words remain, but they cannot do anything for us.

With this kind of a Jesus prayer to Jesus ceases and looking to Him for hope ceases. If any worship goes on the liturgy is empty and the preaching is vain. It leaves people in the wilderness and the people who are in such a wilderness leave the pews.

I will put it bluntly. Any congregation that believes in a Jesus that I have just described is losing members at a faster rate than the rest of western Christianity. And the only reason that the parts of Christianity that confess a supernatural Jesus lose members at all is because they merely confess that Jesus is supernatural. They do not, in fact, believe it.

The Scriptures themselves say this, "If Christ has not been raised, then your faith is in vain. You are still in your sins." The apostles are false witnesses about Christ and anyone who dares hope in such a natural Jesus is to be pitied more than all people.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. He is the first fruits of all of the dead. And if Christ has been raised from the dead then all bets are off on what He can do. If He can raise the dead, then He can do anything. Think about that the next time you are at a visitation or a funeral and the body has been embalmed for viewing. Look at the dead person closely and think that your Lord is going to raise that body on the Last Day. He Himself was a corpse like that one and He rose from the dead. If your Lord can do that, He can do anything. He can give sight to the blind, easy! He can give hearing to the deaf, easy! He can make the lame walk and purify lepers, easy! He can raise the dead all of this other stuff is simple. Walking on water is really not all that ludicrous for One who rises from the dead. He gives life to the dead, why not give life to five thousand men plus women and children one evening in a lonely place?

I remember arguing with a pastor friend of mine about whether or not Jonah was really in the belly of a great fish. He said it was a parable, because it just too incredible for him that anyone could survive three days and three nights inside the bell of a great fish. How would Jonah breathe? I asked him if he believed that Jesus rose from the dead. He said that he did. I told Christy what had happened and she said, "He believes that Jesus rose from the dead, but not Jonah in the belly of the great fish? Is that just too ludicrous for him?"

Once you swallow the fact of the resurrection of Jesus from Nazareth from the dead, the rest of the Gospels become easy to believe. Once you begin to question the miraculous recorded in the Scriptures and wonder whether or not the miracles actually happened, then you are ultimately questioning whether or not Jesus rose from the dead. You cannot affirm the resurrection without affirming the other miracles. You cannot deny the miraculous without denying the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Without a supernatural Jesus our congregation is dead. It is dead not only before God, but it is also institutionally dead. Our children who live in the wilderness will have no reason to come. They will have to go to the surrounding villages to buy bread. They will have to find their life somewhere else.

But Christ is raised from the dead. He is a supernatural Jesus. And no matter what wilderness you find yourself in, you do not need to go away from Him.

He is the supernatural Jesus. He can and will provide for all of your needs. He is the Jesus who has compassion on the crowds.

In the wilderness of sickness and hunger, you do not need to go away from Him. In the wilderness of shame and sin, you do not need to go away from Him. And in the final wilderness, the valley of the shadow of death, even there, you do not need to go away from Him.

In the Name of Jesus, Amen.