**Matthew 14:13-21 August 2nd, 2020**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from the Gospel of Matthew the 14th chapter here re-reading these words. “Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

When I was younger for Christmas one year my Mom and Dad bought me a beginner’s magic set. I remember it came with a big platform where the magic would be performed, it had a trick magic wand, cups with secret compartments, fake decks of cards and even a fake thumb that I was supposed to wear in order to pull off one of the tricks. While I could do a few tricks, I was no master magician. I wasn’t anything resembling a “miracle man”. But, everyone loves a good magic trick. The art of illusion also known as “magic” has fascinated our culture for a very long time. But the magic that I’m talking about is all about misdirection, keeping the focus on one area, while working in the other. And I bring up magic, because we are transitioning in the lectionary of the Church Year. We are moving from looking primarily at the parables of Jesus, to studying and meditating on His miraculous wonders. For the next few weeks God will be revealed to us in the omnipotent power of His Son, who feeds 5000 with just 5 loaves and 2 fish, and who defies the odds and all of the laws of human nature, by walking on water out to His disciples in a boat.

But these aren’t just some fancy parlor tricks, these isn’t misdirection and manipulation of camera angles, no, the miracles of Jesus don’t fit our version of “magic” today at all. They are not meant to entertain, and they aren’t about impressing the crowds back then, or even us today. The miracles of Jesus are teaching moments, just as the parables of Jesus are. They reveal to us the divine nature of Jesus Christ, and also give authority to the claim that Jesus is unlike any other man or prophet the people have ever heard or seen. It is the truth, that He is who He says that He is. He is the Christ. The Son of God. The one sent by God himself to die on the cross and destroy sin forever, whose kingdom is not of this world as He will go on to say.

The miracles, show how miraculous it is that He is here. But where do we find Jesus this morning? Our Gospel lesson shows that Jesus had withdrawn to a desolate place by himself, when he received news that John the Baptist was dead. John’s death is recorded earlier in Matthew 14 and we learn that he was beheaded at the request of a servant girl by Herod the tetrarch. Jesus had gone away to think, and to mourn, not as one without hope but as a man who had lost a friend.

Many times that detail of this miracle is overlooked. The context of this and every miracle is important because it tells us as much about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as the miracle itself. While we often focus on the bread and the loaves, where Jesus was at the time of this miracle, and His emotional state of mind is important. For in it, we see His love for us, and His patience with us sinners. Jesus received those who came to him in a desolate place and healed the sick. He stays with them all day, for it is evening when the disciples come up to him and tell him to send these people away so that they can find something to eat in the villages. He heals them, stays with them, and then even provides for their bodily needs in miraculous fashion.

Think about the contrast there between what we would understand as a miraculous act today, and what Jesus was about to do in the wilderness. Magician’s perform great illusions in front of huge crowds in places like Las Vegas, New York City, and Los Angeles. But these crowds are there because the event has been promoted for months and months. They promote the event so that every single person who can come is there to see it, and they charge enormous amounts of money for ticket prices and memorabilia from the event so that the crowd can prove that “they were there.” Miracles and magic today are all about promotion and self-glorification. Here, Jesus heals their sick and provides for their needs, in the middle of nowhere. Without any cameras, or promotion. We can rule out the fact that Jesus is feeding these 5000 people to satisfy his own ego, or to gain any kind of material wealth. For they are the ones that want to make him a King after these events, but it is He who withdraws from them. No, He is doing it for their wellbeing and to teach His disciples that anything is possible for God. For Jesus tells the disciples to provide food for them. “Jesus said they need not go away, *you* give them something to eat.” And they respond that they only have five loaves and two fish, therefore it could not possibly be done. Yet Jesus says “Bring them here to me.” The impossible is made possible by Jesus Christ, who blesses the food and works miracles before their very eyes.

Jesus does this miraculous thing, for them. Even in the midst of His mourning. To think about the love that Jesus Christ shows to us, when we in no way deserve it, is a miracle in itself. For we are the opposite. We care for others in miraculous ways but not without our own glorification. Not without boasting about it in personal conversations, newsletters, e-mails, and social media posts. Not without making sure that everyone knows what kind of miraculous generosity we have for others.

And sadly, the miracles of Jesus are not just a moment for us to think about ourselves, they also are a breeding ground for our own skepticism and doubt. Magic tricks are met with awe, and also one simple question, “How did they do that….”? And so it is with the miracles that we see recorded in the Gospels by Jesus Christ, and all throughout Scripture by prophets and followers of God. “How did they do that?” which easily leads to “I don’t think they really did it at all.” While a natural amount of skepticism to the “miracles” of today is warranted because it is all illusion and not a supernatural power, that interpretation bleeds over into our lives as Christians. Suddenly you start to question, everything. You start to question Scripture itself and how it could ever be the inspired and inerrant Word of God. You start to question how Jesus could truly be both God and Man and be able to die for the sins of the entire world. Soon we follow in the footsteps of others like Thomas Jefferson who went through and crossed out any part of the Bible that was miraculous or did not make sense to his human reason and logic. Miracles become like Aesop’s fables, teaching moments and nothing more. Miracles become impossible and explained away with human reason, exposing them like a fake deck of cards, or a fake thumb that is used to perform a cheap trick. You doubt. You are skeptical. And that doubt leads to a loss of faith. For without faith there is no life, and therefore doubt is a cancer to eternal life.

Miracles are a double edged sword when it comes to teaching about Jesus Christ. On the one hand they show His power, but on the other they lead to doubt and skepticism. But remember how I said at the beginning that the context of the miracles of Jesus teach us about His love for us. Before Jesus heals the sick of the crowds who come to him, or miraculously feeds them with 5 loaves and 2 fish. Matthew records his emotional state at that time. Matthew only records how Jesus is feeling a few times. In Matthew 8 Matthew records that Jesus “marvels” at the faith of the Centurion, and in Matthew 26 Matthew records how Jesus was full of sorrow and was troubled in the Garden of Gethsemane. I tell you these examples to point out how important it is that He includes recording that at this point, as Jesus was mourning the loss of John in a desolate place and sees the crowds coming to him, that Matthew writes that Jesus had compassion on them. The miracle of Jesus Christ, is that in spite of your sin, and your doubt, and your skepticism, and your selfish pride, He has compassion on you. He loves you. He loves you so much that He was even on the earth at that point, sitting in a desolate place. And He loves you so much, that He heals you. That he clothes you. That he takes care of you, and provides for you. Here we see his miraculous love by taking 5 loaves and 2 fish and giving 5000 men, and really much more than 5000 since Matthew even goes so far as to remind us that this doesn’t include women and children, and Jesus does the impossible by feeding them to the point where they are full and satisfied. But more than just the miracle of this feeding, or the miracle of Jesus walking on water which you will hear about next week, Jesus had compassion on you, and so He continued His ministry. Which led him not to glory and fame. But it led him to the cross. Where he died for you. Where he gave up His spirit, out of compassion and love, for you.

He died to show His miraculous love. And it was not an illusion. It wasn’t a trick. He didn’t pretend to die and then His disciples stole his body and brought him back from the point of death. There was no doubt about it, they pierced His side, and He lay in a tomb for three days. The miracle is, that He died for you. And rose for you. For death could not hold him. He died and rose to take You to be with Him. Now that is a miracle! And it’s no trick. Because He died, you will not die eternally. Because He lives, You will live with him for all time. That is a miracle. That is worth celebrating. That is worth sharing and living each and everyday. It’s worth telling the people in the towns and cities, and even in the desolate places of this world. For life is ours through the omnipotent power of Jesus Christ. The Son of God. Who had compassion on You, and died so that you would have eternal life.

May God bless you this day and always as you feast on his riches so freely provided in His Word and Sacraments. May they nourish your souls as physical bread does your body, and may we remain in His miraculous love all of our days.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.