

## **A God Who is Moved**

Menno Mennonite Church

August 2, 2026

**Purpose:** To explore the work of the miracles as a sign of God's good work and response to the fullness of God's love.

**Message:** We are invited into the wideness of God's mercy and care for the needs of God's people.

**Scripture:** Matthew 14:13-21 (I will read); Isaiah 55:1-5 (Please read)

**Synopsis:** We sometimes wonder where and how God feels about the human condition. Yet we are given ample evidence within the scriptures to tell us. In context, this miracle of feeding the 5000 comes at a tough time for Jesus. He was run out of Nazareth, and he just was informed of the death of John the Baptist. It is in his withdraw to cope and pray about this last happening that he is set upon by the multitude looking for him with need. It would have been understandable for Jesus to take a break, send them away, and take some well-earned alone time. Instead, Jesus encounters the needs of the people and takes pity on them, laying aside his own moment for theirs. He then empowers the disciples to meet the needs that they find in their midst and minister, demonstrating the kingdom of God he had just been describing. Jesus meets us where we are with compassion that he extends and acts on in our midst. How might that steer our response to the many needs of today's world?

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

<sup>13</sup> When Jesus heard about John,  
he withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself.

When the crowds learned this,  
they followed him on foot from the cities.

<sup>14</sup> When Jesus arrived and saw a large crowd,  
he had compassion for them and healed those who were sick.

<sup>15</sup> That evening his disciples came and said to him,  
“This is an isolated place and it’s getting late.  
Send the crowds away so they can go into the villages and buy food for themselves.”

<sup>16</sup> But Jesus said to them, “There’s no need to send them away.  
You give them something to eat.”

<sup>17</sup> They replied, “We have nothing here except five loaves of bread and two fish.”

<sup>18</sup> He said, “Bring them here to me.”

<sup>19</sup> He ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass.

He took the five loaves of bread and the two fish,  
looked up to heaven, blessed them and broke the loaves apart  
and gave them to his disciples.

Then the disciples gave them to the crowds.

<sup>20</sup> Everyone ate until they were full, and they filled twelve baskets with the leftovers.

<sup>21</sup> About five thousand men plus women and children had eaten.

Miracles are amazing. There are few more obvious things that we can say than that. They are the wonders of all wonders meant to stop us in our tracks with a fundamental wow. It is the splash and wonder of the thing that grabs our attention as we are given the visceral proofs that YHWH God is what God says and has power to amend the rules of the world and how things are at a whim of conviction. But at the same time their bigness and level of unprecedented you haven't seen this before nature also puts them out of reach for many of us. We may well have heard of miracles, encountered the exceedingly fortunate in our lives from time to time that we, rightly, attribute to the working of God's Spirit, but we are often left to wonder where the miracles might have gotten to and why we seem to miss them so much of the time. Being the special effects of the biblical story, the stuff of the robes and sandals sort of depictions that we see on the big screen, we generally suspect that our relatively low budget world. We take what we expect to find within the miracles of Jesus: the stuff that is well beyond our imagination and expectation that we can use for evidence of Jesus being who he is. We have our popular notion within the western world: God may be out there somewhere, good for the occasional favor now and again when our backs are up against the wall. We here in the terrarium are pretty much on our own and by ourselves, constrained by the limits of what the conditions may be around us.

It is precisely this feeling and assumption of the world that we need to sit time to time with a story like this. Not because it is a great "Jesus the wonderful" magic trick that wows the crowd and wows us, though it is. Not solely because it is a story of how Jesus did things around people, though it is. Not only because it is amazing and establishes the bonafides of who Jesus was in the context of who and what he said he was—but that is there too. It is easy to look at the miracles of the bible—especially this miracle with its incredible adaptation of the everyday, and wonder what to do with them but smile and nod and wonder "did that really happen?" Sometimes we can struggle to integrate something this extraordinary into our ordinary world, even when we have known this and loved this for our whole lives.

But that assumes that the point of the miracle that we are presented with is the point of the story for the miracle itself. Maybe—just maybe—we are to encounter this story for all the other things that we already named above and add one more rather important thing: it tells us a bit more about who God is and what God cares about, illuminating again a bit more of the kingdom of heaven that we try so hard to imagine. Maybe the point of the miracles is also to tell us about God and what God does.

That needs a bit of unpacking. One of the things that we lose by reading the bible as we do is the flow of the story. Because we break down one thing to the next to the next we can snip the threads of context that the story relies on for its broader meaning. Because we read this solely as a story about 12 baskets of leftovers, we throw away the beginning: *when he had heard this, he went away alone...* Wait—when he had heard what? It turns out that the connections here are rather important. Just before this in chapter 13 he tries and tries to explain the nature of the kingdom of God to anyone who will listen and very few understand. We have been sitting with those over the last month or so now. Then he goes on to Nazareth and tries to teach, only to be dismissed as “Joseph and Mary’s boy—the carpenter’s son” and run out of town confirming the difficulty that the kingdom presents in fairly realistic terms. Then he is told of the fate of his cousin John who met his end at Harrod’s hand within the caprice of the king. All the stuff about the kingdom of God has been now been placed within context of what now.

With this in mind, it makes awfully good sense from the perspective of basic selfcare that now would be a fine time to take a break and regroup. That’s what he is trying to go when he is caught by the crowds seeking yet more from him. It would be more than understandable if Jesus had simply placed the “Do not Disturb” sign on the doorknob and laid down for a long nap, and longer prayer. The way of things was well and truly on display and Jesus needed to be alone.. Instead, Jesus is moved with compassion—the Greek here would be best translated with “his bowls were wrenched with emotion”. It is this deep emotion that is found throughout the Gospel: that moves the Good Samaritan to act, Jesus to heal, the prodigal’s father to embrace—on and on it goes. Here it moves Jesus to lay aside his plans, his needs, heals the sick, and then feed the thousands. I don’t know about you but I often don’t want to think about cooking dinner if I had an off night of sleep, let alone have the weight of the world crushing me.

This is important because it met a need, sure, but more importantly that it tells us something about the nature and character of the one who came to us and the kingdom of Heaven that was being revealed. He was moved and being moved he did something. Compassion is what ruled the day and in that compassion the Jesus makes the miracle. These emotions are important. We might be drawn to or hold within us the notion of the “immortal, unchangeable, God only wise”. Aristotle, whose thought underlies so much of ours whether we know it or not depicts the divine as the “unmoved mover” behind everything but really not engaging with any sort of meaningful way. In short the terrarium God who puts things in order, closes the lid, and

walks away, specifically not moving or caring what ticks along inside. There is ample evidence that this is not the YHWH we worship today, but it is still how we often function within the world that was created by God. The Old Testament speaks of God's compassion and conviction—even God's repentance—time and again. And the witness of Jesus tells us that this is far from the case. Our God feels for us, cares for us, is moved with us. The Word made flesh is so moved by the issues of the flesh that he is able to put his needs on hold to embrace and respond in compassion right when he was at his lowest. That speaks to the nature of the kingdom of God every bit as much as the parables that we have been studying over the last weeks. The miracles are important for what they are. They are also important for what they tell us about the God who moves.

That is indeed good news because it means that God will see our plight, hear our prayers and feel compassion for us. It is also a challenge because compassion is never ours alone. We are never 100 percent right, and there could be time where God compassion will inspire our conviction as well as our comfort when we find ourselves part of that which grieves God. Because our compassion is usually conditional. It is filtered and refined by the nuances of the circumstances and the opportunities that we have to act on our compassion. For me, compassion is frequently my friend as I see suffering and want desperately to help. I am the guy who gets glued to the TV seeing the disasters as we are seeing today, fighting the urge to jump in the car and just go there and start doing what ever needs to be done. But seldom (alright, never) do I actually move on the compassion because there are so many good reasons not to. I am not a trained first responder. I have responsibilities that root me and hold me fast. I am not equipped or trained to do anything particularly useful along the way. Like the disciples, we know all too well the practical sieve through which we pass our compassion all the time. Our capacities are too thin, our resources too stretched, our abilities too paltry. All of which are valid responses. The disciples are talking sense when they advise Jesus to get the folks on their way to the restaurants where the capacity exists to meet the need. We know their feeling when Jesus wonders after their inventory and suggests it might not be so thin after all. We are left either feeling our lack of resources keeping us from responding (there is only so much to go around in the terrarium) and the impossibility of it all can leave us wondering whether compassion is worth it in the end. The reasons hold me back, but I never wish to lose the compassion because I think that is precisely what God invites us into.

But here is the other point that I think we need in this. Jesus invites us into God's compassionate response. The point isn't about what we have, or whether we can adequately respond to that which is going on around us, but rather that we invited into what God is doing with our response—paltry though it may be—to realize that which God is doing. That is one of the biggest challenges to the “world as we know it” way things are. We may well be met with compassion, sure, but we temper it always with the practicality of what is possible given the constraints of the world as we know it. It is into this that Jesus comes to defy the world as we know it and build something new—the world as it really is within the hands of God. The point of our contribution and responding is not always to achieve the effective response but to be faithful to the one who gave us the compassion to feel and the means to respond in the first place and to participate in the ongoing miracle of the Kingdom of God being revealed right here and now. When amplified and viewed through the lens of the loving God and compassionate Christ, we may well be amazed at what can be achieved when we move beyond the impossibilities of what is, and rely instead on the possibilities of the living God. Our job is not necessarily to feed everyone effectively but to use what we have to do what we can in the name of the Christ who is the author of the work come what may. There is much of the life of the church that is constrained by the impossibilities of the present instead of being invited by the loving God in the waiting, wanting world.

Jesus invites us to feel, and in feeling respond, and in responding offer the thanksgiving to God and see what comes next. May we be ever surprised by the God who moves in our midst, inspiring us to embrace the world still being created. Amen.