

Text: Matthew 14:13-21

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—the one that continually fills us with his grace and love that we might fill others. Amen.

A member here asked me as I was approaching the end of the year what were some of the most important things that I learned through the year. I told her two things: I have learned that 1) God's grace is ALWAYS sufficient, in suffering and death and in Joy and Happiness—whatever life brings, God's grace through Jesus Christ is ALWAYS sufficient and that has been evident to me in this community; And 2)—where Jesus Christ is present—Watch out!

The Gospel this morning is one of those stories. Where Jesus is present—Watch out!

In our Gospel from Matthew 14, Jesus has been doing great deeds of power, healing the sick, and doing much good. He is now exhausted and has retreated to a deserted place. But the word that Christ is there travels quickly and by the time Jesus arrives, there is a great crowd gathered. And our text says even though Christ is tired, that he “had compassion” on the crowds and “cured their sick.”

As the hour is getting late—in other words—as the time for supper came, the disciples tell Jesus to send away the crowds for this is a deserted place—one with no food. They tell Jesus to send the crowds away to the villages that they might buy food for themselves. But Jesus, yet again, in his compassion thinks otherwise—do not send them away—YOU give them something to eat. And in the midst of scarcity—the disciples giving Jesus two fish and five loaves of bread-- Jesus provides more than enough. These meager resources provide enough food. In fact they provide MORE THAN ENOUGH. The text says that all ate—and they didn't just have a taste or a little bite to assuage their hunger, the text says that all were FILLED. In fact, there were 12 baskets of leftovers as well! Where Jesus is there is abundance. Where Jesus is there is more than enough.

Where Jesus is, watch out...Where Jesus is gallons upon gallons of everyday water are turned to gallons upon gallons of the best wine. Where Jesus is, compassion is shown and all are healed. Where the hungry are, Jesus fills them with more than enough—he fills them with himself. Where Jesus is, salvation is present. That's the way it is with Christ—Where Christ is present, all will be filled. Where Christ is present watch out!

And my friends, Good Shepherd is a place where it is EASY to see our Lord—it's easy to see Christ present. This is a place where Christ has filled your lives with his grace, with his mercy, with his love. This is a place where Christ has said to you—you give the crowds something to eat. And you have responded-- For Christ has filled us with more than enough and he has called us to be his hands and feet to world—feeding the crowds in Raleigh, crowds in North Carolina, in Zimbabwe and in the world with JESUS—the food that fills—the food that there is always leftovers of. And you have been fed by these people as well with that love of Christ. It shows—Christ is present. Watch out!

Our final word for Life in this summer series is “Filled”. What an appropriate word especially to me on my last Sunday at Good Shepherd. A year ago I came here—last August—wow it just seems like yesterday. I believe it was Christ that brought me here this year and I believe it is Christ who worked through all of you and fed me during the year. Christ is truly present HERE—where the word is proclaimed and the sacraments are rightly administered—where we worship pray and play together. Christ is truly present HERE in the people gathered called to action—and that is YOU. And as we see in Scripture—as we know—where Christ is present—watch out!

What I didn't know at the time was that Christ would be so evident and so present in this community and in my life this year. Before I came, I knew that this church had been doing much

good. Look at ALL of the ministries ALREADY here. This church is one that could easily say—we're exhausted, we've been doing much good and we are going to a deserted place, by ourselves for awhile—we don't need any new ministries. But with the celebration of the 25th anniversary of ministry here, you have invested and given of yourselves to provide another ministry. You have been Christ to me in calling me here. In investing in the cost to bring me here, in letting me into your lives, in filling me with Christ's love, I have been able to try my best to reciprocate that love to you and this community.

You have been Filling me with more than enough love through an internship task force, through the sharing of a home, through meals, through visits, through dare I say—meetings, through sermons, and classes, through being serious, and just hanging out—through joy and through tears, through death and through life—helping me see that the kingdom is here—that God's rule has begun and that Christ is truly living, that Christ is truly reigning and that Christ is still working miracles and using us to fill the crowds with his grace and love—that grace and love that doesn't just fill us but overflows. Christ is present—watch out—he will continue to be here and continue to bring unexpected miracles and opportunities for ministry to you.

As we head forth into new chapters in our lives, I have been blessed to have many words of advice from many of you here. And as we part, for a short time, may these words be my words of advice to you:

--May you know that the work of a disciple is NEVER done—always look for new opportunities to spread the Gospel through word and deed

--may the Cross continue to be the center of this ministry

-- may you all know that God's grace is always sufficient in good times and bad

--May you know that God is deeply and madly in love with each of you and Christ is deeply in love with all people of the world and Christ is deeply in love with all of his creation—

-- And finally, May the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit live within you and fill you so that you may fill everyone you meet with Christ's love and grace that overflows.

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

Amen