

# Faith in the Face of Need

**MATTHEW 14:13-21**

**Proper 13-A, August 6, 2017**

Way back in 1884 a man named James Wells, a theologian and a native of Scotland, wrote a book entitled: THE PARABLES OF JESUS! And in his book, The Rev. Wells tells the true story of a young girl, maybe 12 to 13 years old, who was walking down a street in Glasgow one day; doing her absolute best to carry in her tender arms—this rather BIG BOUNCING BABY BOY! -- Observing her struggle from a distance, a fellow pedestrian was walking down that same street, but coming at her from the opposite direction. He paused to ask her—IF CARRYING THAT BABY BOY—WASN'T PERHAPS—JUST TOO BIG OF A TASK FOR HER? What was her answer?

With surprise, this young girl responded: “No, he ain’t heavy! He’s my brother!”

Those words, “He ain’t heavy, he’s my brother” later became the title of a musical ballad written by THE LYRICIST Bobby Scott and THE MUSICAL COMPOSER Bob Russell; a song that became a worldwide sensation—when it was first recorded by a musical group known as “The Hollies” in 1969.

But this song “He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother,” rose even higher on the musical charts when it was re-recorded one year later by a young, rising male vocalist by the name of Neil Diamond—in 1970. Here are just some of the lyrics to that song:

*The road is long with many a winding turn that leads us to—who knows where? Who knows where?  
But I’m strong, strong enough to carry him! He ain’t heavy he’s my brother!  
If I’m laden, laden at all, it’s with sadness that everyone’s heart isn’t filled with gladness—of love—for  
one another. And the load doesn’t weigh me down at all! He ain’t heavy! He’s my brother! He’s my brother!  
He ain’t heavy he’s my brother!*

I was in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade when I first heard this song, recorded by Neil Diamond, and as the years went on--and I grew in my faith--whenever I heard this song--the PERSON WHO ALWAYS CAME TO MIND FOR ME, FIRST, IS NONE OTHER THAT OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST!

HE IS THE ONE WHO CARRIED NOT ONLY US, BUT THE COMPLETE BURDEN OF ALL OF OUR SINS FOR US, ALL THE WAY TO THE CROSS—WHERE HE DIED AN UNJUST DEATH—FOR US—AND WAS AWAKENED FROM THE DEAD THREE DAYS LATER—TO BRING US THE FORGIVENES OF ALL OF OUR SINS AND TO RECONCILE US TO GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER! He is the One whom we heard say to us in the Gospel lesson, four weeks ago today: “*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest! Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls*” (Matthew 11:28-29)!

Friends, you and I know that the Bible gives us many, many different names for Jesus in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Here are just a few of those names: He is the Almighty One; the Alpha and the Omega; the Author and Perfector of our Faith (Rev. 1:8, Rev. 22:13, Hebrews 12:2); the Bread of Life; the Beloved Son of God and the Bridegroom (John 6:35, Matthew 3:17; Matthew 9:15). He is the Chief Cornerstone; the Deliverer, the Good Shepherd and Immanuel (Psalm 118:22 and Matthew 21:42; I Thessalonians 1:10; John 10:10; Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23; He is also the Judge; the Lamb of God and the Light of the World (Acts 10:42; John 1:29 and John 8:12); just to name a few of those names out loud! But there is another very important name that the New Testament ascribes to Jesus—in at least three different places; that many of us may seldom ever take into our account. This is when the Bible clearly identifies Jesus as “Our Brother.”

(1) Mark 3:31-35, for instance, Jesus was teaching the Word of God in the synagogue at Capernaum; an event took place early in Jesus’ ministry at a time when not even Jesus’ own Mother and his brothers and sisters had a real grasp on the true nature of Jesus’ mission and ministry in this world. As time went on, some people in the synagogue that day interrupted Jesus with what they obviously

believed was a very important announcement: *“Lord, your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you!”*

And this is precisely when Jesus turned and asked these messengers: *“Who are my mother and my brothers?”* And looking about at those who sat around him, Jesus said: *“Here are my mother and brothers and sisters! Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother!”*

(2) Hebrew 2:11 we read these words about Jesus: *“For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying: “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise” (Psalm 22:22)!*

One of the greatest goals our Heavenly Father had in bringing to us the gift of his eternal salvation—is that he might also create from among his human creatures—ONE GREAT BIG NEW FAMILY OF CHILDREN FOR HIMSELF—WITH JESUS CHRIST AT THE VERY CENTER AND WITH JESUS —BEING BOTH ESSENTIALLY THE SAME AS US IN THAT HE WAS ALSO FULLY A HUMAN BEING; BUT ALSO ESSENTIALLY DIFFERENT FROM US, IN THAT HE WOULD BE FROM THE MOMENT OF HIS CONCEPTION, UNDER THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, COMPLETELY FREE FROM ALL SIN!

BUT IF JESUS WAS GOING TO BE FULLY HUMAN, EVEN WITHOUT SIN, IT WAS STILL NECESSARY THAT HE SHARE IN OUR HUMAN SUFFERINGS WHILE HERE BELOW!

This, is why we read in Hebrews 2:15-17: *“Therefore Jesus had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. FOR BECAUSE HE HIMSELF HAS SUFFERED WHEN TEMPTED, HE IS ABLE TO HELP THOSE WHO ARE BEING TEMPTED” (Hebrews 2:14-15, 17-18).*

(3) In Romans 8:29 St. Paul also refers to Christ as our human brother, when he writes: *“For those whom God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers!”* So, what does all of this have to do with—the story of Jesus’ feeding of the 5000 men in addition to many women and children?

It’s all rooted in that one, single word “COMPASSION” found in verse 14 of our Gospel lesson today! *“When he went ashore he saw a great crowd and he had compassion on them!”*

Brothers and sisters, as a footnote, please let me remind you that this miracle of the feeding of the 5000 is the only miracle account of Jesus that is recorded for us in each of the four Gospel accounts that open the New Testament (Matthew 14, Mark 6, Luke 9 and John 6). And the fact that it is does much to impress upon us—how very much importance those believers in the early Church attached to this wonderful day’s events. Many people throughout the history of the world have used this wonderful story to speak about all sorts of different problems that have plagued humanity and that continue to plague humanity down to our present day!

Many people have used this STORY to address the problem of world hunger which is a very big problem indeed. Do you know that according to the United Nations most recent statistics made in 2015—that there were still some 795 million people who go to bed hungry most every evening?

Although these statistics sound horrific and are obviously tragic, according to the United Nations progress is being made—because those 795 million people are still 216 million fewer people who went to bed hungry each night in 2015 than there were 25 years previous in 1990, when there were reportedly 1011 million hungry people in our world!

Have you ever stopped to think of the thousands of Christian agencies that have been formed to combat these kinds of social problems THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD? These are SUCH PROBLEMS AS WORLD HUNGER, CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN DESERTED AS ORPHANS, PEOPLE WITH NO ACCESS TO MEDICAL PERSONNEL TO ADDRESS EVEN THEIR MOST BASIC HEALTH CARE NEEDS; CHRISTIAN HOSPITALS, CRISIS PREGNANCY CENTERS AND THE LIKE?

Well let's not forget that Jesus and his disciples had boarded a boat earlier than morning because they needed some time for themselves not only to rest from what had obviously been a heavy workload in their lives recently, but to grieve the sad, sad news that their dear friend John the Baptist had been executed by Herod the Great in Jerusalem.

Jesus and his disciples boarded a boat...heading to a distant shore on the sea of Galilee, but somehow this huge multitude of needy people see Jesus heading in a new direction and somehow they hotfooted it around the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee and arrive there even before our Lord does!

Jesus could have ordered them all to leave but he doesn't! He chooses to minister to them because of his compassion—an English that comes to us from two Latin words—that make it mean most literally, “suffering alongside of.” Jesus, as already stated, as our brother was willing to come into our world to share in our sufferings—to bring us the gift of eternal life!

It's easy to call Jesus “LORD” isn't it, but to still want to be solely in charge of our own lives? Even though these 12 disciples gladly called Jesus “LORD” and sometimes even used the word “MASTER,” they are the ones who give the first command to Jesus at the end of the day: *“The disciples came to him and said, ‘This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves!’*

But Jesus said, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat!” It's almost as if the disciple respond to him by saying: “Say what Jesus? These people are too heavy and they certainly ain't our brothers and sisters!”

These disciples, however, did offer a great ministry to the people there that day! How?

First these disciples learned how to reflect Jesus' compassion.

Secondly these disciples would also have to learn how to rely on Jesus' resources!

HOWEVER, THESE MEN INITIALLY STILL HAD NO IDEA JUST HOW MUCH THEY HAD AVAILABLE FOR MEETING THESE PEOPLE'S NEEDS BECAUSE THE SON OF GOD WAS THERE!

For these disciples—it was almost as if they were standing in front of Niagara Falls and still complaining that they didn't have anything to drink!

The disciples responded by pointing out TO JESUS that they only had five loaves and two fish, which was precisely Jesus' point. He was calling upon them to do something that they could not do in their own power and with their own resources. He wanted them to recognize their insufficiency and at the same time realize his sufficiency in at least two important ways! First of all, Jesus is the One who meets our needs!

The point here is that Jesus isn't simply the ONE WHO GIVES WHAT SATISFIES! HE IS THE ONE WHO SATISFIES! To put it another way: Jesus came not merely to GIVE US BREAD, BUT RATHER TO BECOME OUR BREAD—to be the sustaining SATISFIER of our souls. On the day following this miracle, John tells us that the multitude came back to Jesus and basically asked our Lord for a repeat performance! BUT JESUS GIVES A THUMB'S DOWN TO THEIR REQUEST--AND THEN SAYS TO THEM: “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life that the Son of Man will give to you! For on him has God the Father set his seal” (John 6:27)!

Secondly, Jesus not only meets needs in us, as if that were not enough, but Jesus also meets needs through us!

If the point of this story was only to show us Jesus' sufficiency, he could have called down bread from heaven right into people's laps. The people could have seen and maybe even recognized him as

the new Moses. However, Jesus not only prays for the Father's blessings, but he also calls his disciples to do the serving!

Please note: Jesus himself did not give out a single piece of bread; instead, he gave the bread to the disciples, and they distributed it. All throughout the history of our Savior's Church, the disciples of Jesus have shown themselves to be—again and again—an extension of Christ's mercy and his miraculous power unleashed in this world!

How might this miracle impact you and me, where we live?

Our natural response—is always the same as the initial response of Jesus' disciples on this day when he fed the 5000 men in addition to many women and children: "What can I do about it? What can we do about it—when after all—we have so little?"

Too often we, like Jesus' first disciples, can totally forget that we are standing at Niagara Falls! Can't we see—that there is plenty of water? Jesus stands ready to meet the deepest needs of our souls and to use our lives, with all of his resources at our disposal, to meet the needs of others too!

None of us could ever save ourselves from the ravages of sin, death, and the destructive powers of Satan. Jesus has saved us, by God's grace, from all of those things! But after we are bought to faith in Christ, through the powerful working of the Holy Spirit through God's Word and sacraments—he does allow us to partner up with him to share this life-changing message with others in our world.

This is certainly what caused St. Paul to say one day: "*We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us! Therefore, we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake God made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*" (2 Corinthians 5:20-21)! And if that's not enough, Jesus made sure to take care of the disciples as well!

It's no coincidence that when the disciples picked up the leftovers, there were 12 basketfuls. When you serve with the resources of Christ and the compassion of Christ, you will be blessed in the process. As you serve others, Jesus will always show himself to be enough for you too! AMEN