

Matthew 14:1-36
Deuteronomy 8
Psalm 77

“Truly You Are the Son of God”

May 31, 2015 (Peter)

In the wilderness, God fed Israel with manna.

If I was just interested in the historical event, I would have read Exodus 16.
Exodus 16 explains the details of what happened.

In Matthew 14, we are going to hear about how Jesus fed the 5,000.

But in Matthew 14, we will not hear about the *meaning* of that event.

In Deuteronomy 8, Moses reflects on the *meaning* of the manna.
Why did God give Israel bread from heaven?

“that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone,
but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”

That’s the same verse that Jesus quotes to Satan during his temptation in the wilderness.

God fed you with manna in the wilderness in order to test you –
Would you listen to the voice of the LORD?

“as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.”

The LORD tests his son to know what is in his heart.

That’s why Jesus had to endure the temptation in the wilderness.

Will Jesus succeed where Israel failed?

The answer was a resounding “yes!”

In Deuteronomy 8, Moses warns, “Take care lest you forget the LORD your God
by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes,
which I command you today ...” (v11)

And notice in verses 12-13 the things that draw you away:

“when you have eaten”

“you have built good houses”

“when your herds and flocks multiply...and all that you have is multiplied”

All of these are *good things* – food, house, herds, flocks, possessions –
all the *good things* of life.

These are *blessings* from God!

But when we love and value the *blessing* rather than the God who blesses,
then we are forgetting the Lord our God!

As Moses says in verse 17,

Beware lest you say in your heart,

‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth...’

When your heart is lifted up, and you think that your success is due to your own power,

that is when you forget the LORD.

And Moses warns in verse 19 that if we forget the LORD,
“and go after other gods and serve them and worship them,
I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish.”

Moses says that God’s provision of manna in the wilderness
was designed to teach Israel the importance of trusting the LORD,
listening to the LORD,
and not turning aside to serve other gods.
And the *warning* implicit in the manna,
was that if Israel turned aside to other gods,
then God would remove his provision and his protection.

Psalm 77 reflects on the Exodus as well.
But this time from the other side.
Psalm 77 sings about the Exodus from the perspective of Exile.
“Will the LORD spurn forever, and never again be favorable?
Has his steadfast love forever ceased?
Are his promises at an end for all time?
Has God forgotten to be gracious?
Has he in anger shut up his compassion?”

Psalm 77 reflects on how God has *removed* his provision and protection.
Will God ever restore his people?
Will God ever show compassion?
Psalm 77 answers that by saying: remember the Exodus.
We serve a God who brings his people back from death.

Sing Psalm 77
Read Matthew 14

In the middle of this long story about Jesus of Nazareth,
we find these 12 verses that tell us about Herod the Tetrarch (Herod Antipas).
What could be so important about Herod
that it is worth interrupting the story of Jesus?!

Matthew places the story *here*
because he has shown us the basic message of Jesus’ Kingdom,
and he wants us to see the *alternative* to Jesus’ Kingdom.

The alternative to Jesus is Herod.
In these few verses Matthew introduces us to the world of earthly power.

The earthly kingdom is all about sex, violence, and power.

1. What Is the Alternative to Jesus? The Death of John the Baptist (v1-12)

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus,² and he said to his servants, “This is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead; that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him.”³ For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife,⁴ because John had been saying to him, “It is not lawful for you to have her.”⁵ And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet.⁶ But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and pleased Herod,⁷ so that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask.⁸ Prompted by her mother, she said, “Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter.”⁹ And the king was sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he commanded it to be given.¹⁰ He sent and had John beheaded in the prison,¹¹ and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother.¹² And his disciples came and took the body and buried it, and they went and told Jesus.

Herod is the family name of the ruling family of the region.

Herod the Great was the Herod who was king at the time of Jesus' birth.

He had at least eight wives, and at least nine sons, two of which were

Herod the Tetrarch – also known as Herod Antipas,

and Philip – usually known as Herod II.

Herodias was the grand-daughter of Herod the Great.

And yes, that means that Herodias had married her uncle, Philip.

And then divorced him in order to marry her other uncle, Herod Antipas (the Tetrarch).

All of these marriages were forbidden by Jewish law.

Under Jewish law, a man was forbidden to marry his niece;

and a woman could not marry her *living* ex-husband's brother!

So Herod and Herodias resorted to *Roman* law,

which permitted them to divorce their current spouses and marry each other!

But John the Baptist kept saying, “It is not lawful for you to have her.”

Herod wanted good relations with the Jews,

so he generally tried to keep them happy –

but undoubtedly John's repeated objections to his marriage to his niece would have rankled.

But now Herod Antipas is throwing a birthday party for himself.

He was famous for his parties – and for extravagance and debauchery.

The story cannot help but remind us of the party of King Ahasuerus in the book of Esther, when Queen Vashti *refused* to make a spectacle of herself.

Herodias' daughter – the daughter of Herod's brother –

will make a spectacle of herself in order to manipulate her uncle/step-father – all to fulfill her mother's desire to see John dead.

She's probably only 13 or 14 years old –

but already she has learned how to “play the game” in the halls of power.

These twelve verses show us the alternative to the Kingdom of Jesus.

The alternative to Jesus is “playing the game.”

Powerful people like to get what they want.

But the only way that they stay in power is by keeping people happy.

And the way that anyone else gets what they want is by manipulating those in power.

Herod may be the ruler –

but Herod fears the people (who thought that John was a prophet).

Herod may be the one in charge –

but Herod entraps himself by his promise to his step-daughter.

Herod fears his guests more than he fears the crowd.

His guests are the influential people of his realm.

He gave an oath – and if he does not keep his oath, he will lose face among the powerful.

Stanley Hauerwas describes this well:

“In a few powerful sentences Matthew has described the insecurity of those in power

who depend on the presumption of those around them;

that is, they must act in a manner that assures those they rule as well as themselves

that they possess the power they pretend to possess.

The powerful lack the power to be powerful,

which means that they live lives of destructive desperation.

That desperation, moreover, often results in others paying the price for their insecurity.” (138)

John was alive – only because Herod feared the people who thought John was a prophet.

Therefore, when Herod feared losing face with his friends more than he feared the people

John’s head became expendable.

That’s the way power works in this age.

You’ve seen this in the workplace – or at school:

those in power are insecure – they are fearful of losing power;

and so they “lack the power to *be powerful*.”

Thus it all ends in violence and death!

If your boss had the legal right to execute offenders,

how many of your co-workers would be dead by now?!

And – let’s be honest – if you had the legal right to execute,

how many would you have killed?!

In contrast, you see Jesus withdrawing from the world of “power” to a desolate place.

And in contrast to Herod, you see the true exercise of power

guided by compassion.

2. Who Is Jesus? The Feeding of the Five Thousand (v13-21)

¹³ Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. ¹⁵ Now when it was evening, 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." ¹⁶ But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." ¹⁷ They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish." ¹⁸ And he said, "Bring them here to me." ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. ²¹ And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

The compassion of Jesus stands in stark contrast to Herod's desperate assertion of power.

Herod used the conspicuous display of wealth and power in his birthday celebration in order to assert his control.

Ironically, he loses control – and has to kill an innocent man in order to save face!

Jesus heals the sick – a conspicuous display of power as well! – indeed, you cannot read verses 13-21

without seeing an assertion of Jesus' authority!

The crowds come to him – they follow him into a desolate place.

He goes in a boat – they follow on foot.

You can imagine the scene: they watch Jesus' boat as it crosses the lake – as they walk and run along the shore, through the hills – watching to see where the boat will come ashore.

Jesus is King.

He is asserting his authority.

"He ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass."

But Jesus exercises his authority *not* for his own sake – *not* in order to be served – but to serve.

This is not a self-serving birthday feast.

Jesus is not surrounded by the rich and powerful.

There are no dancing girls at this feast.

Instead,

He blessed the bread, broke it, and gave it to the crowds.

And five loaves and two fish fed 5,000 men (plus women and children).

This should remind us of how God fed Israel with bread from heaven in the wilderness. But like with Exodus 16, we are not told what this *means*.

The feeding of the 5,000 is like a parable.
It is a story – but there is no explanation!

What does this mean?

Remember that Matthew only writes this down *after* many years.

Everyone reading and hearing Matthew's gospel would recognize these actions:
he took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them, saying,
"This is my body."

The only thing missing here are the words, "This is my body."
The feeding of the 5,000 is *not* the Lord's Supper –
just like the manna in the wilderness is *not* the Lord's Supper.

But it prepares us to see who Jesus is.

At the end of Herod's feast,
John's head was brought on a platter.
At the end of Jesus' feast,
there are twelve baskets full of leftovers –
pointing us to the inexhaustible riches of Christ

But at the end of Jesus' feast, there is no explanation.
Who *is* this man?

3. Why You Should Worship Jesus (v22-33)

a. He Is the "I Am": Jesus Came to Them, Walking on the Sea (v22-27)

²² Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but the boat by this time was a long way^[b] from the land,^[c] beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. ²⁵ And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear.

People do not walk on water –
therefore this cannot be Jesus –
it must be a ghost.

In other words, the disciples are tempted to fall into Herod's way of thinking about Jesus.
It is John the Baptist come back from the dead –
it is a ghost!

²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."

Ego eimi – I am.

These are the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses at the burning bush.

By feeding the five thousand, Jesus had invited comparisons with Moses at Mt. Sinai.
But of course, Moses did not give them bread from heaven.
 God gave them bread from heaven.
If Jesus was simply a prophet like Moses,
 then Jesus would have asked God to feed them.
But Jesus is the *I am* whom Moses saw on the mountain!

The “I am” of Psalm 77 whose footprints were in the sea.
Psalm 77 had asked whether God had forgotten compassion.
Matthew has just told us that Jesus *had compassion* for the crowds.
The challenge of the manna – the bread from heaven –
 was that Israel was supposed to be all that Adam failed to be.
Israel was to love God and obey the voice of the LORD.

But Israel had failed.
 And so God had sent Israel, his son, into exile.

But now, the I AM of the Exodus has come in the flesh.
 “Take heart. I am. Do not be afraid!”

Peter intuitively “gets it” – and so he says:

b. “Lord, Save Me” – What to Say When You Are Sinking (v28-33)

²⁸ *And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”* ²⁹ *He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.* ³⁰ *But when he saw the wind,^[d] he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.”*
³¹ *Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”* ³² *And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.*

As long as Peter sees Jesus, he walks on water.
But when Peter saw the wind, he was afraid.
 This is a good parable for the Christian life!
 As long as we are looking at Jesus, we walk on water!
 Nothing is impossible.
 But we are so quick to look at the wind – to focus on *how impossible* this is!

Jesus may chide Peter for his “little faith,”
 but you and I should marvel that he had faith at all!

And you and I should be *quick* to exercise that “little faith” –
 because when Peter began to sink,
 he didn’t flounder around trying to swim back to the boat.
 He simply looked to Jesus and said, “Lord, save me!”

If you are sinking in your doubts and fears,

cry out to Jesus, "Lord, save me!"

³³ *And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*

The disciples are beginning to learn who Jesus is.

Jesus had said in 11:27 that no one knows the Father except the Son,
and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Now the disciples acknowledge that Jesus indeed *is* the Son of God.

And they worshiped him.

Conclusion: Touching Jesus' Garment – Being Made Well (v34-36)

³⁴ *And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret.* ³⁵ *And when the men of that place recognized him, they sent around to all that region and brought to him all who were sick* ³⁶ *and implored him that they might only touch the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.*

We saw from Jeremiah 13 last Sunday night, that God had made Israel to be a *garment to cling to him*.

If you follow the theme of clothing throughout the scriptures,
you start to see that there is a reason why touching Jesus' *garment*
is able to make them well.

Jesus is the Son of God.

He is God come in the flesh.

The immortal put on mortality.

We should not think of the humanity of Christ simply as a garment!

The union of the divine nature and the human nature is far more intimate!

But you see here that Jesus' power is revealed through his garment.

His garment is life-giving.

What does it mean to worship Jesus?

Hauerwas says it well:

"A church that challenges the powers of this world
is not a church that will need to explain Jesus.

Such a church needs only to worship Jesus.

To worship Jesus means that the fear we experience
from being so far from land in a trackless sea,
buffeted by winds and waves,
will not dominate our lives.

Fear dominates our lives when we assume that our task is to survive death
or to save the church.

Our task, however, is not to survive, but to be faithful witnesses." (p141)

You have been a faithful witness to the ICU at Memorial Hospital.

They have watched many elderly people die.

Many parents – grandparents – with large extended families –
die with no one to hold their hands.

And yet, they now marvel as a steady stream of Jesus' brothers and sisters
go to comfort what was once a lonely old bachelor who had no purpose in life.

Rolf was amazed when someone nominated him for elder.

He was even more surprised that the congregation elected him.

But he understands that his calling is *not to survive, but to be a faithful witness*.