

THE LORD'S CONCERN

Matthew 14:13-21 Text vs. 14 *"When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them and healed their sick."*

A teaching hospital found that one of their young resident students had a marvelous effect on children. They responded to everything he did to them with happiness and in ways they didn't respond to any other person on the staff. The hospital asked a nurse to discover what this young resident was doing to have such an effect on his patients. She found the answer the second week she was on night duty. It was simple. Every night the young resident would kiss, hug, and tuck every one of his little patients into bed. That simple act of compassion and sympathy connected with them.

And in our lesson today, Jesus showed that compassion and sympathy should teach you more than anything else about Jesus. *Jesus cares!*

In any hospital's Intensive Care Waiting Room you will find a lot of suffering people. You will hear a lot of questions like, *"Will my husband make it? Will my child walk again? How do you live without your companion of thirty years?"* I served two years as a Staff Chaplain at the Naval Hospital in Portsmouth, Va. Believe me, the Intensive Care Waiting Room in any hospital is different from any other place in the world. People who wait there are different. They can't do enough for each other. No one is rude. Race and class melt away. A person is a person, *first*. Everyone understands that. Each person is pulling for everyone else in the Intensive Care Waiting Room. The world is different there. Vanity and class disappear. Everyone is focused on what the doctor will say when he comes through the door. If only he would say their loved one is okay and showing improvement! Everyone knows that loving another is what life is all about. If we could just learn to live life like that!

Today, our lesson had Jesus traveling and teaching, using parables some of which we learned last week. He had gone to visit His hometown and was run out of the Synagogue there for His teaching. The people Jesus grew up with took offense at Him. They were "astonished" by His wisdom and His mighty works. In their minds, they already knew who Jesus was based on His childhood and were insulted at the idea that someone like Jesus could be so important. Later he said, *"A prophet is not without honor except in His own town and in His own home"* which means people are often more likely to respect and honor someone who is not from their own community or family and that people can be more successful or respected outside their hometown or home country.

Then, as He was teaching on the seashore of Galilee, He heard that His cousin, John the Baptist, had been imprisoned and beheaded by Herod. He immediately got into a boat and went away to be by Himself. But when He got there, it was late in the day. People had followed Him along the shoreline and were hungry. That caught His attention, and it's the background for the miracle of feeding the 5,000. The disciples were so fascinated by that miracle they wanted to crown Jesus King. But *Jesus* wanted something else. He wanted them to *learn* about the *Kingdom*, which is a whole different story, because it's easy to recognize God's Kingship in the midst of His miracles. But to recognize His Kingship during a storm takes faith!

A big rock was giving a little boy a lot of trouble. The father watched through a window as his son tried to move the rock to the edge of the sandbox. Each time he tried; it looked like the little boy would be able to push the rock over the side of the sandbox, but the rock would fall back into the sandbox. The last time it rolled back and pinched one of his little fingers and he began to cry. The father quickly walked out of the house to his tearful son and asked him what was the matter? His son told him all about the heavy rock in his sandbox. The father asked, *"Why didn't you use all the strength you had?"* The little boy replied, *"I did dad. I did!"* His father smiled and said *"No son. You didn't ask your dad."* And with that, the father reached down together with his son and removed the rock from the sandbox.

That's kinda' like the missionary who was given a car that wouldn't start without a push. After thinking over his problem, he created a plan. He went to the school near his home to ask the Principal's permission to take some children out of class and have them push his car to get it started. Then, as he made his daily rounds, he would either park on a hill, or leave the engine running. He did that for two years until ill health forced him to resign. A new missionary came to take his place. And when the old missionary began explaining how he got the car started, the new man looked under the hood and before the old missionary's explanation was complete, he interrupted him and said, *"Why, I believe the only trouble is this loose cable."* He gave the cable a twist. Got into the car. Turned the switch on.

And to the old missionary's astonishment the engine roared to life.

And isn't that how it should be with the problems you face in life! Instead of trying to solve them all by yourself, turn them over to God! He knows how to make things right in your life, even if you don't have a clue! He will arrange what's out-of-control. He will touch you with His care. He will help you to understand what's needed to fix your life. And what's needed to put God first in your life!

See, when you put *something* first in your life, it becomes your priority. And priorities determine where you give most of your time and energy. Some prioritize their job and spend most of the day working or thinking about their work. They may even take it home with them! Some prioritize their family and are constantly involved with family activities and affairs.

The same is true when God is first in your life. Putting God as your priority means you focus on God throughout the day giving Him a lot of your time. Examples of that might be daily prayer, attending church regularly, participating in a Bible study group, making sure you read your Bible every day!

You see, your relationship with God works differently from your relationship to work or family. On average, you work eight hours a day making a living. Not many people claim to spend this much time in a church. Or even in prayer. You spend time with your family. You care for your spouse or your children. And the time you devote to your work or your family, is time you don't give to God. So, your connection with God is different. Putting God first means keeping Him uppermost in your mind. You don't prioritize God by always being in church. You do that by praising Him in everything you do, whatever you do, and whenever you do it. Everything you do in life as a Christian should be done to honor God. If you keep God uppermost in your mind, you don't have to ignore relationships or activities that don't necessarily focus on Him. Instead, you will want to start witnessing about God in all your relationships, circumstances, and responsibilities, either by word or by example!

The key phrase in our lesson today should be, "*He had compassion on them.*" And what is compassion? It's having an understanding and concern for the sufferings, or misfortunes of others. So, just as Jesus was concerned for others, you should also, be concerned for others! Can love for God help in a difficult marriage? With a rebellious child? A difficult neighbor? Can you give unconditional love to the most unpleasant person where you work? Your love for God will help you love them with a love that expects nothing back. But through the power of the Holy Spirit, you will be able to extend God's love to others in spite of their response, or lack thereof! And how grievous it must be to the Holy Spirit when Christians give so little of their time and energy to building up the kingdom of God!

It's time for a wakeup call! It's time to get busy in this church. Whether it's teaching, greeting visitors, serving lunch, reading the Bible lessons during worship on Sunday morning, or doing whatever is asked of you. In the body of Christ, which is the church, each believer has unique spiritual gifts to contribute. And when you put the Lord first in your life, you will want to serve in your church and help in building up the body of Christ.

It's as if we're sick and tired, and the Lord is concerned about us. "*When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them and healed their sick.*" And "*in Him we live and move and have our being.*" (Acts 17:28). Our Lord is worthy of your attention in everything you do. In everything you say. And in everything you think. As a believer in Jesus Christ your Risen Lord, you have the Holy Spirit within you to prompt you toward righteousness. Your devotion, and your behavior will move you forward in the Spirit. Then, you can't help but put God first in everything you do. Let it happen! Let it be so! AMEN