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Focus Scripture
Matthew 14:13–21
Additional Scriptures
Genesis 32:22–31
Psalm 17:1–7, 15
Romans 9:1–5

Generous Provider,
teach us to trust
in the abundance
of your good gifts,
and open our
hearts and hands
to share with oth-
ers. Shape our lives
to model the spirit
of your generosity.
Amen.

Table of Plenty

God can accomplish much with little. A few loaves and fish feed multitudes. An unpromising character is changed and lends his new name to the entire people of Israel. Community is shaped by such compassion in action. These stories evoke trust in God to welcome us to the table and provide plentifully for our needs.

Focus Scripture: Matthew 14:13–21

An experience of grief leads to the act of compassion recorded in the focus passage. “When Jesus heard *this*” refers to the death of John the Baptizer (14:1–12). Matthew next notes: “When the crowds heard *it*, they followed...” Does “it” refer to where Jesus had gone? Or was “it” the news of John’s death? As Jesus seeks rest – and perhaps time to grieve – in withdrawal from community, the crowds follow.

Other stories in Matthew’s gospel engaged in this season also reveal how compassion compels action. For example, compassion led Jesus to heal a woman who had been ill for 12 years (9:20–22) and to send out disciples in mission (9:35–38). In the focus scripture, Jesus’ compassion leads first to healing and then to feeding. Compassion is more than an attitude – it is faith in action. Those who respond with compassion can trust that God will provide for the need of the other and also for the need generated by their action.

After Jesus has healed many (14:14), the disciples want to send people away from Jesus. The avowed reason is for the crowd’s own good – it is evening and they need to find food. But where the disciples would close off community and leave others to fend for themselves, Jesus summons community to be opened in ministry to others. The disciples find themselves called to trust God’s abundance – abundance that is not yet in view.

In the hands of Jesus, scarcity proves more than enough. Note the verbs Jesus speaks in this deserted place. They are the same verbs used in worship when faith communities celebrate Communion: take, bless, break, give. Then as now, God uses ordinary elements of life to provide extraordinary grace for living. Whether in fish and loaves or bread and wine; all may eat, all may be filled.

When the crowd follows, Jesus sets aside Sabbath rest and tends to their needs. In doing so, Jesus calls the disciples to set aside their reliance on their own resources. The amazing results of such compassion are demonstrated in the 12 baskets of leftovers. This recalls the story of provision in Exodus 16, especially verses 22–26, when what was left from the gift of manna was sufficient to provide for the people’s need for Sabbath food. God will provide the needed food and the needed rest.

People of faith are called to be compassionate. This theme weaves through the additional readings. Paul, in **Romans 9:1–5**, agonizes for his people Israel. As Jesus set aside personal needs for renewal to exercise compassion for the crowds, so would Paul willingly sacrifice for his kindred. **Genesis 32:22–31** opens with Jacob separating himself from his family for the sake of their safety; he does not know what will come of his meeting with his estranged brother Esau. At the end of his wrestling with the stranger, Jacob’s hip suffers injury, even as he receives the blessing of a new name. Jacob, now Israel, is deeply changed. This story and **Psalm 17:1–7, 15** offer images of what it means to seek God’s blessing with persistence. Jacob perseveres in his struggle with the stranger to receive a blessing. The psalmist cries out for vindication and God’s steadfast love.



God’s abundance overflows in miraculous and transforming ways. Where does compassion invite self-giving, sacrificial acts from you and your church? Whom might you invite to join you around God’s table of plenty?

Go to www.spiritseasons.com and click on Spirit Sightings for international current events, links to this week’s theme, discussion questions, and intercessory prayer suggestions.

