

## Day One

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Enjoy today's devotion from Lutheran Hour Ministries.

### “MEETING HUMAN NEEDS”

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. When He went ashore He saw a great crowd, and He had compassion on them and healed their sick. (Matthew 14:13-14)

There is a cost to freedom, and sometimes we aren't the ones who pay it. We are used to thinking of Jesus as the only sufferer in the story of His Passion - and obviously He is the main person, the One we should love and honor and glorify.

But others paid a price, too, and Jesus knew that would happen - and it grieved Him. In this case it was His cousin, John the Baptist. God sent John to prepare the way for Jesus, and John did this with all his heart - preaching, teaching, and baptizing, always pointing the people to Jesus, who was coming.

But then King Herod got angry with John for criticizing him, and he threw him in jail. That was hard on John, and probably hard on Jesus as well, especially after John appeared to be having second thoughts about Him (Matthew 11). And then came the final blow, when Herod had John killed. “Now when Jesus heard this, He withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by Himself.” He wanted to be alone to grieve.

But the crowds wouldn't even let Him do that. People followed Him, their minds on their own troubles, and Jesus would not turn them away. He healed them and taught them. This is how much He loved them, and how much He loves us - that He is willing to pay the price of grief so that we could be rescued from the power of evil. And even more than that, He is willing to put His own human needs aside to care for us.

He loves you with this same love even today. He is aware of your needs. As Paul puts it, “Christ Jesus is the One who died - more than that, who was raised - who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Romans 8:34-35)

**THE PRAYER:** Dear Lord, thank You for laying aside Your own needs to meet ours. Amen.

### Reflection Questions:

- \* When you are grieving, what do you do to feel better?
- \* When do you have to put aside your own needs to care for someone else?
- \* How does it make you feel, to realize Jesus would do this for you?

Lenten Devotions were written by Dr. Kari Vo.

## Day Two

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The devotion from Lutheran Hour Ministries for today is based on Matthew 14:15-16. The context is the feeding of the 5,000. Sometimes God puts us in what seems an impossible situation so that we can clearly see His hand at work.

### “BREAD FROM HEAVEN”

The people of Israel were fond of remembering the days when Moses led them through the wilderness and God provided them with everything they needed, including food. The people could not farm while they were traveling toward the promised land; so God sent them manna, a kind of bread-like substance they could gather from the desert floor each day. They called this “bread from heaven” – God's miracle to provide for them.

Many years later, Jesus and the disciples were in a similar situation, with 5,000 hungry people out in a deserted place and nothing for them to eat. Being practical, the disciples suggested sending them away to find food for themselves somewhere else. Then Jesus said the really astounding thing: “They need not go away; *you* give them something to eat.”

Sometimes it feels like God has given us Christians the same ridiculous order. You may have someone in your life that God seems to have dropped into your lap - a friend, neighbor, or family member you are attempting to care for. But their needs are so great, and your resources are so small! You are overwhelmed. I know the feeling well. We've spent 30 years trying to care for a refugee community with very few resources indeed.

So what can we do? We can be as honest as the disciples and admit, “Lord, I can't do it. I don't have the resources. You have to tell us what to do.” And then we can pray and keep an eye out to see how God provides. He is able to care for us and the people we love, even today.”

It is right for us to turn to Jesus in every need, because as He says, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is My flesh” (John 6:51). The same Lord who gave His life for us on the cross will care for us in every need of body and spirit.

**THE PRAYER:** Dear Lord Jesus, You know the needs we are facing. Please help us. Amen.

### **Reflection Questions:**

- \* How has God provided for your needs in the past?
- \* What needs are you asking God for help with right now?
- \* Is there someone you are caring for right now who has needs you can't meet? Take a moment to pray for them.

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## **Day Three**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today's devotion is based on Matthew 16:13-16. The question of the day is: “Who is Jesus?” It's an important question, even for those who don't believe – maybe especially for those who don't believe. He is light and life.

### **“GETTING IT RIGHT”**

My husband is a pastor with a mischievous sense of humor. Every time I ask him what he's preaching on this week, he says, “I'm going to preach on ‘Who is Jesus?’” If he had preached on that topic every time he said he would, we'd be up to about 5,000 sermons on it so far!

Still, he's got one thing right. The question “Who is Jesus?” is very important. Peter got it right - he answered Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” What does this mean? And what does it mean for us?

First of all, Jesus is the Christ - the Anointed One, the One God chose to be our King and Savior. He is the One God promised long ago to send into this world. All the prophets foretold His coming.

This means we can rely on Him. He is not some self-appointed Messiah who will let us down in hard times. The full authority of God lies behind Him. Whatever He says and does is what God sent Him to do and say. He is utterly trustworthy.

Second, He is the Son of the living God. Jesus is not simply a man, no matter how great or wonderful. He is in fact God Himself - the Second Person of the Trinity, sent by God the Father to become a human being among us. This means He is not limited. As the Bible says, “He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him” (Hebrews 7:25a). Because He is the Son of God, His suffering and death on the cross are enough to rescue every one of us - and to raise us from the dead, just as He Himself rose.

**THE PRAYER:** Lord, help me to know and trust that You are who You say You are. Amen.

### Reflection Questions:

- \* Who are you? What are the first three quick answers that spring to mind?
- \* Which name or title of Jesus is closest to your heart, and why?
- \* Why does it matter who Jesus is?

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### Day Four

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today's devotion from Lutheran Hour Ministries is based on Mark 8:31-33. It shows how important it is that we continue to read God's Word even when we don't always understand it – especially when we don't understand it. We need to do that because God continues to speak to us through His Word to help us see and know Him as He truly is.

#### “GETTING IT WRONG”

And He (Jesus) began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He said this plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But turning and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

Ouch! That must have hurt, having your Lord and Master call you “Satan” and rebuke you for having your mind set on human things instead of God's. And yet Jesus was right. Satan *was* acting through Peter at that moment - trying to turn Jesus aside from the path God wanted Him to walk, the path to the cross.

Peter had gotten the first part of the test right - he answered the question “Who do you say that I am?” with “The Christ, the Son of the Living God.” But he completely missed the second, implicit question, “What am I here to do?” And he wouldn't figure it out until well after Jesus completed His mission - until Jesus indeed suffered, died, was buried, and rose from the dead. Then Peter finally got it.

I am so very, very glad that Jesus didn't listen to the devil speaking through Peter. The devil's aim was to keep us all in slavery, to prevent Jesus from setting us free to be children of God living in God's kingdom. But Jesus wasn't going to have that. He came to give us freedom, to give us life - and that abundantly.

Jesus is human as well as divine. It couldn't have been easy for Him to walk around knowing the precise pattern of His death so far ahead of time. It couldn't have been easy to set His face toward Jerusalem, knowing what waited for Him there. And yet He did it. He did it because of the prize, the joy set before Him - because of you and me. His suffering and death would mean our everlasting life. His resurrection would be our joy and happiness forever. In His eyes, it was worth it.

*You* were worth it.

**THE PRAYER:** Lord Jesus, thank You for loving me enough to bear the cross to set me free. Amen.

### Reflection Questions:

- \* How would you feel if you could know the exact details of your death ahead of time?
- \* Have you ever had to bear pain in order to help someone else? When?
- \* How did you feel about the pain you bore for that person? Do you think Jesus felt similarly about the pain He bore for you?

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### Day Five

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today's devotion is based on John 7:37-39. Jesus is speaking about thirst – a thirst that is not physical. It is the thirst for peace – for meaning – for purpose. He tells us that thirst is satisfied in relationship to Him. Joined together with Him in Baptism – in His death and life – we receive peace through the forgiveness of our sin and purpose to share that peace with others.

### **“FREEDOM FROM THIRST”**

Most of Israel is by nature a dry land. There is the Jordan River, but most people in Jesus' day got their water from wells or cisterns - places where they kept rainwater so they could use it during the dry months. In a land like that, water is valuable. Quenching your thirst takes more work than simply turning on a faucet.

And that was the context in which Jesus cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” Jesus was teaching in the temple when He made this offer. How many people must have heard Him!

They knew, of course, that there are many other kinds of thirst than for plain physical water. There is the thirst for meaning in your life - the desire to know that what you do makes a difference, that life is more than just empty posturing before you die, and everything is lost. There is the thirst for the presence of God - the desire to be close to Him who made us and continues to care and provide for us. There is the thirst for life - not just mere existence, but real, abundant, overflowing life, filled with joy and a sense of purpose. All of these things Jesus offers us.

And how? Because He has promised us His Holy Spirit, God Himself to live within us and transform us into God's own children. With Him living in us, we will never again go thirsty for meaning or life or God's own presence. Jesus made this possible when He went to the cross for our sakes. By His suffering and death, He set us free from the power of sin and the devil, and by His resurrection He gave us everlasting life and final victory over death. He sent the Holy Spirit to live with us forever at Pentecost. What wonderful gifts!

**THE PRAYER:** Lord, give us this living water forever. Amen.

### **Reflection Questions:**

- \* When have you been thirstiest in your life?
- \* How does Jesus' work give meaning to your life?
- \* When have you been most aware of the Holy Spirit living within you?

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