

## Jesus - Cares for People (demonstrating the compassion of God)

To begin our thoughts today and place a song in our minds and hearts, I wish to share a musical version that I composed of, perhaps, the most loved passage of scripture, the 23rd Psalm.

The Lord is my Shepherd I have everything I need.  
God leads me to still water and gives me strength indeed.  
I'm guided in right paths as promised and rested in fields of green  
so that when I go through darkness I shall not be afraid.

The Lord is my Shepherd I have everything I need.  
Your rod and staff protect me, at lavish tables feed.  
You welcome me as an honored guest so my enemies can see  
my needs are granted fully, my cup full to the brim.

The Lord is my Shepherd I have everything I need.  
I know your goodness and love will always be mine.  
And your house will be my house as long as I live.  
For The Lord is my Shepherd I have all I need.

We have been speaking about **seeing God's love revealed in the life and ministry of Jesus** the Christ. We have been speaking **about Jesus as the "vision" of God metaphorically** by the author of the Gospel of John. In the first chapter, in his baptismal scene the Spirit of God anoints Jesus as the human proclamation, the living Sentence - the Word and the Verb, to reveal the fullness of the mystery of God who is Spirit as was clearly made known to Nicodemus who came to Jesus by night. Nicodemus found it difficult, as so often we do, to fully comprehend the magnitude of God's love and presence in the whole world as he was told. To actually understand that this Living Word speaking to him was not to bring condemnation but life in all its fullness to everyone.

Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr says, *"Jesus is the invasion of God's Big Picture into our small worlds, and he does this much more than he talks about it. We have to look at Jesus' actions, and how his physical healings consistently rearranged faulty relationships—with our own self-image, with*

*others, with society as a whole, and with a God who was henceforth seen as on their side.*" (God Seems to Care About Human Suffering, Richard Rohr Meditation 17 of 52)

This metaphor now continues in John's Gospel with Jesus sharing 7 signs of God's love as he travels about his homeland. We begin to sense the scope of that love as it touches people's lives from a variety of cultural experiences. We continue to use the summary of spiritual presence encompasses from Galatians:

Galatians 5:22-23 - "But the spiritual nature produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There are no laws against things like that."

Today we look at how the love of God is expressed by kindness, goodness, and faithfulness.

### **KINDNESS & GOODNESS** - Jesus Feeds the 5000:

Like the woman of Samaria who, earlier this journey, came to a well to fetch water to quench her thirst, having met Jesus her thirst for righteousness was satisfied, so much so, that she went back to her get her neighbors so they could share her joy and enjoy their personal satisfaction in having met Jesus.

Now, in this story, Jesus is confronted by a much larger crowd who followed him to hear words about God's love and compassion for them. The more popular literal understanding of this sign is an attempt prove that Jesus is the Christ by utilizing only 5 loaves and two fish to feed over 5000 people. They further note in this story that there were more than 12 baskets of food left over after all the people consumed all they could eat. Jesus was said to point out (John 4:48) "Unless you see miraculous signs and wonders, you won't believe." It is my belief that John's Gospel was not trying to "prove" anything about Jesus, only trying to show us the overwhelming compassion of God's love for all people and their needs. When this story is interpreted as a metaphor or allegory we witness the Spirit of God but never prove God or anything about Jesus.

This story teaches us that people, who are hungry and burdened by lacking the basic necessities of life, can never comprehend love and compassion by words alone. **They need actions to demonstrate** that God is serious in providing for those needs through we who are willing to serve God in providing those needs. We are called to be like Jesus in like manner serve in our world today.

## **FAITHFULNESS** - Jesus Walks on Water

The next sign is Jesus coming to the aid of his disciples when he “walks on water” to reach them in their boat on troubled seas. The popular interpretation here usually focuses on Jesus, whom the author of this Gospel introduces as the word or expression of God, **so what does this sign say about God regarding people then and now?**

**As we noted earlier, these are signs or metaphors wherein Jesus shows dramatic examples of God’s love for us. Jesus’ miracles inaugurated the Kingdom of God on earth.** Remember that, contrary to popular perception, “myth” for religious scholars today, is not a negative term that is synonymous with fairy tales or fictional accounts. *“At the time of Jesus, **the Greco-Roman world was replete with stories of miracles** performed by gods, demigods, and specially endowed humans. Contrary to our modern inclination, these miracles were less about their “extraordinariness” and more about their role in experiencing the divine, (according to Hendricks in The Miracle Stories”, 3-5). [from Chap 6 - The Churches Seven Deadly Secrets by Paul H. Jones] **“For them, their world was divided into three levels: the upper world, the underworld, and the earth in the middle.” At the time of Jesus there were a multitude of gods, “more than three hundred sanctuaries dedicated to Asclepius alone that functioned like present-day outpatient clinics. These healing centers permeated the first-century world of the early church.”***

In addition to these Greco-Roman traditions of the world in which Jesus lived and how early Christians experience of life, **we need to remember the Jewish context as well**, which is the “cultural cradle” for early Christian thought on miracles. **“First**, biblical Hebrew has **no equivalent word to the English word “miracle”**. There are (pele’) and (nifla’ot) often translated as

“wonders” (Exod 3:20 & Josh 3:5) and “miracles” (Ps 78:11) respectively.... with two key Hebrew words, (‘otot) and (mofetim), which are usually translated as “signs” (Exod 4:8 & 1Kgs 13:3). **Second**, the First Testament [O.T.] ‘**makes no distinction** between signs proper and miraculous divine intervention in human history’ **since the modern concepts of “nature” and “natural law” are unknown in Judaism.**” [Paul H. Jones, “The Churches Seven Deadly Secrets”]

We might note here that the Gospel of John was written near the turn of the first century around 100 CE. It, therefore, was not an eye witness account of the time of Jesus but rather a commentary and summary of what Jesus brought to this new century in announcing the Kingdom of God. This is why John's Gospel is very different from the Synoptic Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. After the destruction of the Temple in @ 70 CE many groups with differing views developed among both Jews and Christians.

Understanding the world views at the time of Jesus, when many people were performing miracles, “Jesus’ miracles by themselves did not prove his uniqueness” either. Remember that, miracles par-say, for anyone who worked miracles in Jesus' day, were less about demonstrating their “extraordinariness” and more about exemplifying their role in experiencing the divine. This understanding would be applied to Jesus as well. **Jesus’ miracles inaugurated the Kingdom of God or the "way of God" among people.** His miracles were demonstrations of the way everyone should be experiencing God's grace and compassion. The early Christians were called "followers of the way" as they continued the "extraordinariness" of God's grace and compassion in their "way" of living.

**Galatians 5:22-23 - "But the spiritual nature produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There are no laws against things like that."**

It is our spiritual nature - which we receive through grace - produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These are the fruits that no law is able to produce.

Jesus, the living word and verb, demonstrates the compassion of God's Realm to show us how we are to behave in our way of life. Jesus even tells us, (John 14:12) *"I can guarantee this truth: Those who believe in me will do the things that I am doing. They will do even greater things because I am going to the Father."* This is why we are invited to be followers of Jesus, to speak and do in our lives today as well. When we stop taking the Bible "literally" as proof and read it "metaphorically" for our benefit, we allow it to change our lives so that we might change our world.

With God's Spirit of love we are assured that we also can reflect - patience, kindness, and goodness. In closing let me share the words of another Gospel song that assures us of God's presence always in every circumstance of life, even today.

I trust in God wherever I may be  
Upon the land or on the stormy sea  
Let come what may from day to day  
My heavenly Father watches over me

He is a friend that's always near to me  
He walks with me all through the night and the day  
He hears my prayer, He hears me when I pray  
My heavenly Father watches over me

Chorus:  
I trust in God I know He cares for me  
On mountain peak or on the stormy sea  
Tho' billows roll He keeps my soul  
My heavenly Father watches over me

AMEN!