

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost – 2026

Isaiah 55:1-5

Romans 9:1-13

Matthew 14:13-21

He hadn't died yet. Jesus is in the Upper Room on the night that He was betrayed and He's celebrating Passover, He's about to institute the new and greater Passover. He hadn't died yet. And the Lord Christ gave His disciples His body to eat and His blood to drink (Matthew 26:26-28). Do you believe that time is God's master? Could Jesus give His disciples His atoning blood *before* it has been shed on the holy cross? Before we get to that, let's focus on one word...

Desolate. It's an onomatopoeia kind of word, at least to me. Onomatopoeia is a word the sound of which suggests its sense. The word for the sound that a snake makes is onomatopoeia – hiss. Splash, thud, sizzle; these are all examples of onomatopoeia. Desolate; say it slow enough and the sense of the word comes out. Go past Palm Desert, go east beyond 29 Palms and you will get a good look at desolation. Rock, sand, and heat – heat, sand and rock; you may as well try to live on the moon as in that place. The moon will give you a better view. Monday morning, August 6th, 1945 – the city of Hiroshima lay desolate. Grim are the pictures. Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden of Eden and a curse was upon the ground. It would produce thorns and thistles. "Cursed is the ground because of you" (Genesis 3:17). But it was in their souls that the real desolation was located. Sin and death – *that* is desolation. Shame, guilt and fear – that is the fruit of desolation. In "desolation" did my mother conceive me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is in my "desolate" nature.

St. Matthew tells us that Jesus ventured into a desolate place (Matthew 14:13). The Lord had just heard of John's death. Historians tell us that Salome was likely a teenager. Her mother, Herodias, was a vindictive, murderous villain. Herodias had married one uncle and then another. John the Baptist called out this lawless union and Herod Antipas has John jailed. In as vulgar an episode as there is in Scripture, Salome dances for her mother's new husband and he, in a fit of gratitude, promises her anything (Matthew 14:1-12). Salome, prompted by her mother, asks for John's head on a platter. A festive plate that is designed to elevate the beauty of a banquet is used to convey the head of God's greatest prophet. That is how desolate man is. Jesus hears this. Imagine the grief! Perhaps instinctively, Jesus seeks out a place that reflects His grief. And the crowds follow.

What does that tell you? The crowds heard where He was and they followed Him, out there, to a desolate place. Jesus pulls ashore and He sees them – a mass of humanity. He sees their inner struggles, their insecurities, their losses and their fears. What's His reaction? Compassion; genuine, deep, and abiding compassion; Jesus is moved to the core of His being. Humanity would marshal all its malevolence, all its hostility against Him as He was crucified (He knew it was coming), and this loving Savior sees the crowd and has compassion. The eternal Son of God ventures into our desolation. Jesus IS the Father's compassion. Our Savior brings the garden of God's grace into our Hiroshima, grace born not of cold duty, but grace born of the warmth of genuine love. He heals them. All the sick; Jesus heals them. He took what was theirs and gave them what is His.

Part of our faith is looking into the mirror and truly confessing what is there. We behave badly. We, believers that we are, behave as though we prefer the desolation that sin brings. Part of our faith is amending what is desolate, turning from our sin and adopting Christ's ways. Is it our intention to stay in a desolate place, to live in faithless desolation, ignoring God's commands, doing as we please, irrespective of who it hurts? Do you want to live that way? Do we want to treat others like we're some sort of mob boss, doling out reprisals when someone doesn't meet our standards? Do we hold our affection hostage, giving it only when someone measures up or when they polish our boots? Husbands, do you treasure your wives and bless them with your tenderness, or do you criticize, harping about trifles that only expose the desolation inside you? Wives, do you seek to encourage your men, or do you obsess about what you don't have, and spread your desolation to them?

The day got late and the disciples thought that it was time for the Lord to cut the crowds loose. "Send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves" (Matthew 14:15). It's understandable. You and I would've said the same thing... perhaps. But didn't Jesus just miraculously heal a bunch of people? The Israelites, when they were cut loose from Egypt, wandered in the desert, a desolate place, and God fed them. Manna in the wilderness, bread from heaven – that was the food upon which they made their way to the Promised Land. Jesus said: "I am the bread of life" (John 6:48). Do you believe Him? Do you remember Elliot from the movie E.T.? Elliot is the young lad who led the extra terrestrial around by dropping Reece's Pieces for the creature to follow, breadcrumbs only sweeter. Jesus told His disciples, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat" (Matthew 14:16). The Lord was leading His disciples, leading us, by dropping theological Reece's Pieces for us to follow. The disciples' supplies were meager. Mary, the mother of our Lord, when they ran out of wine at the wedding, had the good sense to tell the servants to look lively, because with Jesus anything is possible. The disciples... not so much. "We have only five loaves and two fish" (Matthew 14:17).

Now to our original question: Is *time* the Lord's master? Do you reckon that Jesus knew what He would do in the Upper Room on the night that He was betrayed *before* He fed that crowd with five loaves and two fish? Do you think that, as He told His disciples to give them something to eat, that He knew that He would institute the Office of the Holy Ministry and that pastors would be the stewards of the mysteries of God, giving Christ's people His body to eat and His blood to drink (1 Corinthians 4:1)? When God fed the Israelites with manna in the desert, did He know that His Son would feed the multitudes, that He would feed sinners with the bread of life, feed us here in our humble little church? Or do you believe that Jesus just made all of this up on the fly?

Compassion; what is the apex of divine compassion? Was Golgotha, the Place of the Skull, not a desolate place? Brutal injustice; the curse that God pronounces on the ground in Genesis becomes a mocking crown upon the head of the Lord of Glory – thorns bringing their desolation to the sacrificial Lamb. Jesus took the desolation that inhabits our hearts and minds. He suffered the just penalty for our sins. Death, cruel and cold and calculating and merciless death, descended on the only Man who had a garden in His soul, a heaven in His being. Jesus hung on a cross as the apex of desolation: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" It's a cry of dereliction, a cry of desolation.

His corpse was placed in a tomb. Friday to Saturday, Saturday to Sunday, and He rose. Death could not hold Him. His holiness, His perfect and unending and radical holiness saturated His sacrifice. Sin was paid, death was undone, and He rose. We feed on that death and resurrection. They all ate and were satisfied (Matthew 14:20). Do you think that this miracle producing Lord could not have made the right amount? He made extra, an abundance! Why? The future Kingdom came breaking into that crowd. They were healed. The abundance of grace, the abundance of love, the abundance of compassion – it was a heavenly banquet in the confines of a desolate place. Christ's church was at His feet, eating the supernatural food that He provides, a foretaste of a future that He knows well, a future that He gives to us now as we kneel to receive the bread of life. We are not desolate. Love abides here, among us, in us. Sacrifice and beauty and eternal virtue abides among us. We are the sheep of His pasture (Psalm 100:3). We are those who will follow Him wherever He is to be found. Live like it! Live like heaven is our home! We will practice His teaching, endeavoring to learn His Word and reflect His goodness to those around us. Today we eat. Today a feast is spread. The abundance of heaven is in this meal. Rejoice in your forgiveness and eat. Rejoice in the life that comes to you in simple bread and wine. Rejoice in the salvation which Christ has won and now belongs to you.

Oh, what a beautiful mornin'

Oh, what a beautiful day.

I've got a beautiful feelin'

Everything's goin' my way.