

Sin's corruption in our world has many, many effects. The big one is obviously death, but there's all the little things, too. The stresses, the frustrations, the disappointments. Some days it may feel like Jeremiah describes, being a sheep in a scattered flock, running around in circles without any sure direction or place of security. The idea of being scattered shows one of sin's worst effects: isolation, both from God and from each other.

Caught up in everything, you wonder if anyone really knows what's going on.

And if they knew, would they care – not just “Oh, I'm sorry,” but truly care?

And even if they care, what could they do, how could they act to help you?

Our Gospel account features people who are caught up in this whirlwind of life, too. Yet as they ask, or maybe don't even ask, the questions I listed, they find their answer in Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Jesus knows, Jesus cares, and Jesus acts.

As our reading begins, we meet the disciples, returning from their journeys across the region. Jesus had sent them out earlier in the chapter to preach and heal in His name, and they've returned.

You get the picture of a group of excited students telling their teacher all they'd done, and everything that had happened, and healings, and demons... and the whole time Jesus quietly listens, and smiles, because He knows.

As excited as the disciples are, Jesus knows that they're also exhausted. They've been incredibly busy, and even on their return people are still coming and going nonstop!

Jesus knows they need a rest, and Jesus cares. He's no slave driver, running His disciples ragged. No, Jesus called them out of love, and is teaching them out of love, that they might share His love with others. Jesus cares about all His followers.

And so He acts. He has the disciples hop into a boat and sail away to a deserted part of Galilee. It's time for a rest, time to recover, time that they need, and so Jesus acts to make it happen. With the gentle breeze blowing them across the sea, they can relax and have time away from the hectic reality ashore.

However, there's another group with pressing needs: the crowd. They are chasing Jesus and His disciples as they sail across the Sea of Galilee, running from towns throughout the area to try to get to Jesus.

No doubt they have many needs, each individual seeking something as he or she runs along the shoreline. But all have a need for Jesus.

As the boat with Jesus and the disciples scrapes up on the beach, they're already there, a crowd, a flock, looking for guidance, for relief, for help.

And Jesus knows. He knows the fears, the doubts, the worries, the concerns, the hopes of every single person on the shore. He knows that they are a flock without a shepherd, wandering in the wilderness of sin and death, with no shepherd to guide them to the path of life.

Jesus knows, and Jesus cares. These are His people. He created each and every one of them. He knew them from their mothers' wombs. He came from heaven to earth out of love for them.

He cares, and so He acts. Despite having only a boat-ride's rest, Jesus begins teaching them many things. He explains the Word of God to them.

He shows them from the beginning of time how God has cared for His people.

He points out God's faithfulness, always keeping His promises of deliverance.

And He reminds them that God is sending His Messiah, the righteous branch of David, who will execute justice and righteousness in the land, who will save Judah, who will cause Israel to dwell securely.

Whatever the people's concerns and troubles are, they are answered in the promises of God.

It isn't only their souls for which Jesus has concern. He knows of their bodily needs as well. And so when the disciples come to tell Jesus that the crowd will need dinner, it isn't news to Jesus.

Jesus knows. And Jesus cares. That's why He turns down the disciples' suggestion, to send the crowd away to buy themselves food. The shepherd doesn't scatter the flock; the shepherd tends the flock and provides for them. And Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

Jesus acts. He commands them to sit down, or more literally "recline," in the green grass – just like the Twenty Third Psalm: "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." He will feed His flock miraculously.

As all this is happening, Jesus knows of another group with a need: His disciples.

Despite being with Jesus all the time, hearing His teaching, seeing His miracles, the disciples are still sinful men. They believe, and yet they doubt. They follow Him, and yet they don't fully know Him.

But Jesus knows them. He knows their hearts. He knows their faith needs strengthened.

And He cares for them. He desires that they be in heaven with Him, enjoying eternal life at His side. He knows the great challenges that lie before them, and He cares that their faith is strong enough to bear the burden of spreading the Gospel after He has ascended.

So Jesus acts. He acts in a surprising way, giving them a task that seems impossible. When the disciples tell Jesus to send away the crowd, He answers them, "You give them something to eat."

What? That seems crazy, impossible even. As their response points out, they'd need a fortune to pay for food for this crowd, and even if they had a few hundred denarii just lying around, what bakery in a small village has enough bread left at the end of the day for five thousand men, not to mention all the women and children too?!

There's no way they can do this!

And Jesus knows that. That's the point! Jesus knows that they are still looking to themselves rather than to Him, and He cares for the sake of their souls that they learn to fear, love, and trust in Him above all things.

So after hearing their response, Jesus acts. He directs them to what they do have – five loaves and two fish – and then He directs His eyes to heaven. Through His actions and His words of blessing,

Jesus reminds the disciples and all who are listening that it is the Lord who provides and sustains, who causes our cup to runneth over.

And then, by His almighty power, Jesus multiplies the loaves and the fish, causing this small supper to be a banquet of incredible proportions. Every single man, woman, and child is given all they need, completely satisfied.

And note that Jesus didn't give the bread and fish to the crowd Himself, but had the disciples do it. He told them to give the people something to eat, and by His divine power, He enables the disciples to accomplish their task.

This truth, that Jesus knows, cares, and acts, is just as true today as it was on that day next to the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus knows you. He knows what's going on in your life. He knows your struggles and concerns, your worries and fears, your temptations and your failings. He knows your sin.

Nothing escapes His notice, from the conversations in government offices and corporate boardrooms to the shortest text message or briefest facial expression. He knows your heart.

And He cares. That compassion with which Jesus looked at the crowd is the compassion with which He looks at you. You too are His creation, formed by His own design, made out of His boundless love and creativity.

Humans are not just mass-produced, each and every one of you is a masterpiece of the Most High God, made by Him and for Him. He caused you to be brought into existence so that you could live in His presence forever!

And so He acts. In the greatest act of love that has ever been or ever will be, the God who made the universe and everything in it offered Himself as a sacrifice.

The Word of God became incarnate and died on a cross. The Good Shepherd allowed Himself to be torn to shreds by the wild beasts so that His flock might live.

The sheep didn't do anything to help; you and I don't contribute to our salvation any more than the members of the crowd contributed to getting the bread and fish.

God poured out His love for all people in the blood of His Son, Jesus. It is this blood that cleanses us from all sin, that restoreth our souls.

But this great act was not the end of Jesus' love and care for us. He still knows what goes on in your life. He still cares for you in your day-to-day existence. And He still acts to work all things to good.

His providence grants that we are still given our daily bread, still have a roof over our head and clothing on our backs.

Sometimes He does send us trials, even ones that seem impossible, like the task given to the disciples. But He does this because He knows and cares about our faith, and knows that often times hardship and discipline are what's needed to strengthen our love and trust in Him.

But even when things are at their hardest, He is still there for you, never sending You away.

Today we are blessed to celebrate the Lord's Supper, where He feeds us in a miracle even greater than the one in our Gospel text.

Here, Jesus gives us not just food for our stomachs, but forgiveness for our souls.

Here, Jesus isn't just the host, He's also the meal, letting you partake of the life of God Himself.

Here, not just five thousand men plus women and children are fed, but the millions of Christians all over the globe, plus the countless host that's already in heaven, all these saints are gathered around the Lamb's High Feast.

In the Supper, you get to experience what David wrote of when he said, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." It doesn't matter that the world is hostile to God, that they think this is some silly ceremony, that they believe Christianity is a bunch of bigoted myths – even in the midst of a fallen and sinful world, even in the midst of our own sin, God prepares a table and lets us be in His presence.

Clothed in His righteousness, fed with the bread of heaven, we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. All of this, because Jesus knows, and Jesus cares, and Jesus acts.

In His name, amen.