

The Seventh Sunday After Trinity  
St. Mark 8:1-8

Prayer: Lord God, heavenly Father, in the wilderness by Your Son You abundantly fed four thousand men, besides women and children, with seven loaves and a few small fishes: we beseech You, graciously abide among us with Your blessing and keep us from covetousness and the cares of this life, that we may seek first Your kingdom and Your righteousness, and in all things needed for body and soul, experience Your ever-present help; through Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen.

In the Name of Jesus, the Bread of Life, dear Fellow Redeemed;

The significance of the words Jesus spoke to His disciples was certainly not lost on the crowd of 4000. Very likely, many of them also had begun to realize it had been a while since they had last eaten. They had perhaps gone out to listen to Jesus with the intent of staying for perhaps the afternoon, maybe the day, maybe overnight, but then returning home. The thought of food had perhaps crossed their minds earlier, but they figured they would listen for just a little while longer, and then go get something to eat. One more hour, they may have thought, and the next thing they knew it was dark, and now even the most devout must have begun to wonder about the earthly matter of hunger. And as Jesus says, for many this was not the hunger that told them it was almost time for dinner; it was the hunger that would not allow them to walk even ten or fifteen miles to the nearest town to get something to eat. It was the kind of hunger that makes people temperamental and irritable, and in the lull where Jesus is conferring with His disciples, asking them what they think should be done about this situation, it is likely that many were beginning to show their annoyance. Annoyance with themselves for not having thought ahead, for coming out here in the first place, and for not going back when they had first felt hungry. Annoyance with their neighbors for being irritating. Annoyance with Jesus for having led them out into this remote place, seemingly without a plan. And, of course, annoyance with God. After all, it would have been one thing if they had done something bad that had made them deserve a little hunger and suffering. But they found themselves in this situation because they had been doing something good! They were out listening to a sermon, hearing the Word of God, faithfully giving attention to Jesus as He spoke to them about sin and forgiveness, about the love of God and the kingdom of God. And the result is finding themselves in a remote place with nothing to eat. Some Messiah. Some Savior. Some God.

It probably would have given them no comfort at the time, but this was certainly not the first time the people of God had found themselves in a situation like this. Seemingly doing all the right things, and seemingly abandoned by the God who supposedly loved them and was watching out for them. The Children of Israel were

slaves in Egypt, during which time they cried out to God for deliverance, and for 400 years it seemed as if God wasn't listening. Where was God in their suffering? They are led out of Egypt by God's prophet Moses, and find themselves between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea, harassed by hostile nations on their journey, several times they lacked fresh water, and of course, they found themselves out in the wilderness with no food. Several times they accused Moses saying, "*you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger*" (Exodus 16:3)!

God's prophet Elijah was sent to preach repentance to Israel, especially to King Ahab and his wife Jezebel. And despite the fact a drought came as a call to repentance, just as Elijah said there would be, despite God's demonstration on Mt. Carmel that He alone was the one true God, Elijah saw little result from his work and preaching, except the result of being persecuted by Ahab and Jezebel, and so he became discouraged. "*It is enough!*" he said to God. "*Take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.*" (1 Kings 19:4)

The Children of Israel, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, the faithful remnant carried into captivity to Babylon, all of them asked, "Where is God? Why is He not taking care of us? Have we maintained our faith in God only to be abandoned, to have to return and faint on the road?"

Nor would that crowd of 4000 be the last to wonder if they should faint on the way. The first Christians underwent severe persecution at times, many forced to leave their homes, many dying for their faith, many asking the question at times, Where is God? And while we perhaps have never had to suffer anything quite that severe, we know what it is like to be thought of as believing things that are a little odd, and we can also sympathize with the 4000 in their predicament. We believe in God, we trust in His forgiveness. We come to hear Jesus, and yet there are times when we find ourselves seemingly led out into the wilderness to faint. Times when there are more bills to pay than money in the bank. Times of illness and suffering. Times of difficulty and strife in our family with our spouse, or parents, or children, perhaps even brought on by our faith. Times of financial difficulties in our business, or in our congregation. Times when our faith and our connection to God seems to bring more stress than comfort in our lives. Times when we have wondered,

### **Shall We Faint on the Way?**

And like the children of Israel, like Elijah, like the people of God too often do in this situation, we complain, wondering what we have done to deserve this, or if we really are better off as the people of God than the children of this world. We no longer are interested in hearing about spiritual things, we want God to act and deal with our *real* problems, and then, when we are no longer hungry, or poor, or unsatisfied, when we have all that we need, *then* we will be able to give attention to spiritual things.

And then, like the Children of Israel, like Elijah, like the people of God too often discover, we are not the spiritual, upright people God would have us be. We, who have been saved from sin and from death because the Son of God died in our place, we want to talk about getting what we *deserve*. We, who wish to call ourselves men and women of faith, find that too often our "trust" in God exists only as long as we are in the black.

Like the disciples, we have more faith in a ready source of cash and the resources of a nearby town than we have in the Son of God with seven loaves of bread.

Like the Children of Israel, like the 4000 in our text, like the people of God throughout history, we find it is often the way of God to lead us into those places where only He can provide the exit. God at times allows our faith to be tested because too often we wish to put most of our trust somewhere else, and thus it is important that we constantly be re-directed to the One True God. That we hear that our sin and guilt of faithlessness is forgiven, and that our meager, halting trust is multiplied in the person of Jesus who was faithful and trusting for us. This is not to say that we will see the good outcome of every difficulty and problem in our lives. There are times we may have to wait like the faithful in Egypt, or in Babylon, or in Rome, trusting that even in evil times God watches over His people. But we wait knowing that God was with His people in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness. He was with Elijah and with the captives in Babylon; He was with the Church under persecution and with the 4000 in the wilderness, and thus He is with us in our difficulties and our struggles, ever-aware of His promise to deliver us from evil.

Gloria Patri...

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