

We read as follows in Jesus' name:

... Lifting up His eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward Him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" He said this to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do. ...

Jesus then took the loaves, and when He had given thanks, He distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted.

And when they had eaten their fill, He told His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." ...^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dearly Beloved,

The Collect for Trinity 11 starts off like this: *Almighty and everlasting God,*

You are always more ready to hear than we are to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve:

Isn't that such a pointed petition?

It's striking to me because it brings out our sinful weaknesses,

while extolling God's faithfulness... in the face of our sinful weaknesses.

And this is exactly what we see going on in our text, isn't it?

The people were coming to Him, not necessarily because they recognized that He was the Christ, but "**because they saw the signs that He was doing on the sick.**"

But Jesus doesn't reject them for this.

Instead, He has compassion on them and already has in mind their needs and how to bless them.

He knows He will preach to them, and this He does.

He will heal those that are brought to Him. He always does that.

But none of the people are recorded as saying anything to Him about food, expecting Jesus to feed them all out there in that desolate.

It is as we pray, *You are always more ready to hear than we are to pray.*

In fact, He is the One who brings it up to Philip, saying,

"Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?"

It's almost as if Jesus were saying, "Hey, there's something missing."

He was pointing out the people's needs; that He knew and recognized and that He wouldn't leave them in the lurch.

This way His disciples would recognize it, too,

and see how Jesus would answer that need, not with denarii, but with God's Word of blessing.

Dear fellow redeemed and recipients of God's anticipatory mercy,

The Lord knows all your needs, as well, even and long before you do.

How many of us went without breakfast today because there was nothing in the cupboard/fridge?

How many of us wear rags because we cannot afford, or have not been given, clothing?

How many of us walked to church because there was no gas in the car?

How many of our congregation aren't watching the livestream because we have no electricity?
Or computer, tablet, or phone, or internet?

For many of us, the Lord has been very gracious to us in providing much more than our daily needs. Even among those with the least amount by way of income, we have more than most in this world. And for all of us, He has provided a place and time to gather and to receive His life-giving Word, and His strengthening and sealing Sacraments, and ministers to preach and teach and administer these means of grace. But while we have such blessings all around us and given to us by God's gracious providence, like Jesus' disciples, we need to be constantly reminded where these blessings actually come from.

Because these blessings can also begin to grab our attention.

Cupboards need to be restocked, clothes need to be laundered and purchased, Cars need to be maintained and filled with gas. Electric and internet bills need to be paid. These things need money, which means we need income from a job or benefactor or investments. And while we are involved in acquiring or maintaining the cash flow, there are temptations for other, more necessary needs to be put on the back burner.

While our earthly needs are met, either with struggle or with little concern, or anywhere in between, let us not forget about our spiritual needs.

The faith given in your baptism needs to be fed and nurtured with Jesus, the true Bread of Life, just as much as your stomach needs food and drink.

The sin that you daily soil yourself with needs to be washed off in confession and absolution and the new daily provision of Jesus' righteousness needs to be put on.

The conscience that is riddled with guilt needs the care and attention of the Physician of the Soul.

Let us not neglect these things or put them on the back burner, or even the middle burner.

...

Two weeks ago, in Confirmation class, we came upon the question in our catechism (Q. #321),

Do those who neglect the Lord's Supper commit a sin?

(Of course, we could also include in this question neglecting the preached Word.)

And I love how the catechism boils down the answer. It notes 3 distinct offenses:

1. The offense against yourself: as you deprive yourself of such great blessings.
2. The offense against fellow believers, whose fellowship you neglect.
3. The offense against the Lord: whom you slight when He offers such rich blessings which are refused because they are neglected.

It is as we pray, He is more ready to give than we either desire or deserve.

...

Out in the wilderness, out in the deserted place, is where Jesus had the opportunity to show His disciples and the people where their help really came from.

It is often in your daily lives (at home, school, work, in the community, even on the news) where God shows us or lets us feel our spiritual needs.

But He doesn't just leave us feeling them without also anticipating and providing for our needs.

Notice that Jesus didn't simply start multiplying bread, but first He gave thanks for it, even that small amount of bread and few fish among so many.

He first taught them to look to their heavenly Father for His mercy upon them.

And so we learn to look to our heavenly Father and to pray for His mercy.

And the Divine Service provides us even with the Words to pray, "*Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ...*"

And when we are not in the penitential seasons of Advent or Lent,

we join in the Christmas song of the angels, "*Glory be to God on high and on earth peace...*"

Because into this earth, our Prince of Peace was born, taking on human flesh and blood and entering our wilderness of daily, earthly and spiritual needs and temptations.

He knew poverty and need. He knew physical, as well as mental, pain and suffering.

He knew trauma and anguish. He knew sickness and, even death.

He knew them because He took them all on Himself, as Isaiah said,

A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief... (53:3)

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; (53:4)

But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed. (53:5)

Jesus doesn't just know our griefs and sorrows and transgressions,

He knows your griefs and sorrows and transgressions...

But He also knew contentment and peace with God.

He knew trust and holiness, even through the suffering and pain and death.

And these things He gives to you by the power of His Holy Spirit.

He does not find you coming out to Him in the wilderness in order to send you away hungry, but instead gives Himself to you and all that He has from His heavenly Father.

He took your burdens of sin and guilt as His yoke carried to Golgotha

and in exchange, gives you His easy and light yoke of perfection and righteousness.

He took your anxiety and fear, your concerns for daily necessities

and gives you His trust and confidence in the Lord's gracious, daily provisions.

In truth, this is the primary reason we gather together each week.

It is not primarily so that we can render to God our acts of worship.

It is not primarily to give God His due, our songs and prayers and offerings.

We can do those things just about anywhere these days.

No, the primary reason we gather together each week, is to receive Jesus' good gifts and blessings.

You come as a sinner to give Him your sin

and to receive His forgiveness, hearing His authorized ministers declare you "not guilty."

Your sins are forgiven.

You come as a spiritual beggar needing spiritual bread,

and He feeds you with Christ's body and blood and satisfies you... and still He has more to spare.

You come as the spiritually lame and sick, dying of sin,

and He heals and restores your health and vitality.

For a conscience at peace with God gives health and vitality to the body as well as the mind and soul, even to the body riddled with cancer or arthritis or pain or stress.

And in receiving, then we are moved to respond with prayers of thanks and praise,

and with service and obedience.
Then you respond with your prayers for more mercy as your trust in Him grows stronger.
Then you respond to Him with your offerings as your confidence in His daily provisions
sets you free from covetousness and fear of need,
and you desire that this Word and refreshment be readily available to you and others here,
and to still more people abroad.
Then your responses and hymns are richly seasoned with joy and gratitude and faith.

Dear little children,

You will never be able to out give God.

For when you give Him anything, you simply return to Him what is His.

And as the boy who had 5 loaves and 2 fish found out, the Lord can make it even more blessed.

So it is as we offer our Lord our offerings and with them,
purchase the bread and wine for the Lord's Supper.

We offer these to God and He returns them, not simply for physical nourishment,
but in them He gives to us something that not even silver and gold or diamonds
or all the wealth of the whole world could afford,

He gives to you forgiveness of all your sins, life and eternal salvation
in the very body and blood of your Savior.

It is just as we pray, *He is always more ready... to give than we either desire or deserve.*

Thanks be to God.

Soli Deo Gloria