

## In Nomine Iesu

### The Seventh Sunday after Trinity 2021 Man needs, God provides – Mark 8:1-9

“In those days, the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples to Him and said to them, “I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar.” Then His disciples answered Him, “How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?” He asked them, “How many loaves do you have?” And they said, “Seven.” And He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and they set them before the multitude. And they had a few small fish; and having blessed them, He said to set them also before them. So they ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments. Now those who had eaten were about four thousand. And He sent them away. And immediately He got into the boat with His disciples and came to the region of Dalmanutha.”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

In the Garden of Eden man’s food came without work. Eden was fruitful and produced abundantly. There were no storehouses or silos, no preservatives or refrigeration, and no need for them. Man had no competition for food from mice or pests, mold or weeds or blight. All that changed when Adam’s wife was seduced by the serpent, and he failed to protect and guide her, when he, following her urging and not God’s word, reached for knowledge of good and evil, seeking to be like God, and so ate fruit pleasing to the eye, yet so destructive. He who was created in the image of God, and so possessed true righteousness, threw it away only to stand alone in the middle of paradise, as it already began to decay, miserable in his nakedness, overwhelmed with regret. He is the perfect picture of the human condition, which we do well to remember.

#### I

Yet God did not abandon Adam and Eve the way we would abandon one who showed unfaithfulness to us. By His grace, we still eat. The earth still produces fruit, although it exacts a cost from us, as God said it would in the aftermath of the fall: toil and sweat, and often blood. We are the fallen children of Adam, heirs of his sinfulness. But the earth still yields its fruit. Herbicides and pesticides, fertilizer and hybrids, machinery and the collective experience of ages have made it easier than it was when Noah and his family cautiously emerged from the ark and surveyed the flood-ravaged environmental disaster that was left to them. But the earth is no longer the garden planted by God and overseen by perfect Adam, where work is joy. Today man must work the soil, fight against weeds, insects, and disease. When he gathers in grain, he must still protect it. And even when it has been processed into flour and baked into bread, mice and mold threaten it so that it must be eaten quickly before it is stolen or rendered inedible.

Man thinks his labor is the key. He thinks that he has put bread on his table by his effort and wisdom. Farmers sit in the local café, drink coffee, and discuss the harvest they’ve just brought in. They judge each other on the straightness of rows, the yield per acre, the profit of the farm, and the choices each made to plant this or that crop for the coming year. They share their experience. And they learn. And they extract more from the still productive ground God made. And sometimes they fall into the trap of thinking it is all their doing, and theirs alone.

But it never was their doing. For whenever men, women, and children eat, it is God who provides. It is He who has given each of us our “body and soul, eyes, ears, and all our members, our reason and all our senses,” as we learned in the catechism. “He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” (Matthew 5:45) In other words, all that we have and all that we make use of are gifts of God. It is He who reins in the consequences of Adam’s fall on the forces of nature, for every community is always only a single hurricane or catastrophic fire or uncontrollable disease away from disaster and famine. Sin has given us crime in our streets and in our boardrooms, disorder in our cities and ungratefulness in our hearts. Yet, despite all this, God continues to provide in His mercy.

There is great comfort in our Lord’s feeding of the four thousand as we face the reality of our decayed and dying world – a world in which we are not in control, where the sons and daughters of fallen Adam dwell in the shadow of death. Here no government can make us completely safe. Even if violence would cease - which it will not - tsunamis and hurricanes will come, volcanoes will erupt and forests burn, men will steal, lie, and kill each other because of their greed and pride. And our own personal sins of treachery, betrayal, selfishness, and pride, will cry out to God for vengeance. For we deserve to be abandoned to the devil and his angels for the evil we have done.

Despite the fact that every one of us deserves judgment and condemnation, we are still here. We live, breathe, and eat. We did not put the food on our table yesterday by means of anything we did not get from God. The food that graced our table yesterday, however humble or grand, was a gift from God. We did not earn it. And it will be the same today, and tomorrow, not because God owes us anything, but because He gives us everything, because He is good, even when we think He’s not, as we see the condition of the world, the evil of men, and our own lot in life. God is not what we think. He is what He says. He is good. He is in control now as ever; and He knows what He is doing.

## II

So do not be afraid. God is good. He knows what He is doing, even if we cannot see it. So what, O Christian, can wind and waves, chaos and violence, lies and threats, sickness and insecurity do to you? You belong to God. His compassion for the four thousand on that day they were hungry pales next to His love for you in Christ Jesus the crucified. You He has clothed with the righteousness of His own Son in the miracle of baptism. You have become, by virtue of the faith **His Spirit has created** in your heart, His own dear children in whom He is well-pleased. He looks at you, and sees only the perfect righteousness of His own Son.

Nor does He desire to see you faint in famine or fatigue, grief or terror; but even then, better that than you forget your dependence upon Him; better that you faint and suffer than that you stray from His path and lose your soul. And even when you faint and falter He still feeds you, provides for you, comforts you, and loves you, even as He did for the 4000. He welcomes you back when, after you have fallen in sin, your faith reaches out once more to Him who alone gives what is good.

Some in the crowd Jesus fed that day in the wilderness would agree with His accusers on the day He was crucified. They would chose a murderer to go free in His place. And even if many of the 4000 did not agree with, participate in, or assist in His crucifixion, by their silence or inaction, each had a share of it. Each contributed sins and evil that He atoned for in the light of God’s justice. Jesus knew all this the day He fed them. It did not stop Him. It did not hinder His compassion or dampen His desire to do for them

what they could not and would not do for themselves. For Christ truly is no respecter of persons, as the Holy Scriptures say. He loves all. He has no discretion, no prejudice, no malice, even toward those who would turn on Him, hate Him, and refuse His grace. He loved them anyway, to the end, providing for them in death, giving His life for the sins of the world. His compassion is without end, and His resurrection the life and the hope of all who believe in Him, even if they – we - endure and suffer here because of sin.

Dear friends, here is the comfort in today's text: We are not in control. God is. His ways are past finding out. But wherever men eat, know this, it is God who provides. Not because He must, but because He has compassion on the multitude. His mercy endures forever. His love is beyond measure. He welcomes to Himself murderers and terrorists, because He became flesh and gave Himself for them as well. He would rejoice if they would repent and believe. For unlike the god of Mohammed's foolish and malevolent imagination, our Lord Jesus Christ really is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the promised Savior, who takes no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but would have all believe in Him and be saved.

It may be that God will not heal all our diseases or multiply the oil and the flour in our pantry. He may allow the specter of natural catastrophe, terrorism or war to cast their evil shadow over our lives. He may call you to bear a heavy cross and shed many tears. You might even be condemned to cruel, unjust, or even life-ending punishment. He may allow you to go without for a while, even a long while. But **He will not let you touch a drop of the cup of His wrath toward sin.** For that cup His beloved Son has drained. Because of his life, death, and rising from death, God has declared you to be without sin, beyond the reach of judgment and condemnation. In the gospel He lays His claim on you. He has called you to be His own, for you are baptized in the name of His Son! You He welcomes into His presence, laying His hands on you, declaring your sins forgiven, unburdening your conscience. You He welcomes to the table of His crucified and risen Son, there to receive and be strengthened by His body and blood, given and shed for you. And that, dear friends, is a far, far greater miracle and honor than being fed amidst 4000 others with a day's worth of bread.

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So, remember this well, whenever men eat, it is God who provides, both now and after, here and hereafter. Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. For His mercy endures forever. His mercy endures far beyond the sadness of this life. His mercy will welcome you into paradise. So, be patient. Trust in Him who rules all things for the sake of those who are His by faith. The unending rest and plenty you need will come to you for Jesus' sake. Amen.

**Soli Deo Gloria**