

In Nomine Iesu

***Laetare*, the Fourth Sunday in Lent 2022 Lead us, great Shepherd of Israel – John 6:1-15**

“After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased. And Jesus went up on a mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near. Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?’ But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do. Philip answered Him, ‘Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that everyone of them may have a little.’ One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to Him, ‘There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?’ Then Jesus said, ‘Make the people sit down.’ Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, ‘Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.’ Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, ‘This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.’ Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to a mountain by Himself alone.”

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

On the Sundays of Lent we have followed the historic lessons from the Scriptures. Each of the Gospel texts chosen by the ancient church emphasizes the undeniable connection between Jesus of Nazareth and the prophecies of the coming Messiah. The first Sunday in Lent concerns the temptation of Jesus, the second Adam, by Satan. He endured the temptations we know from our own experience. Yet He did not sin. Next, we hear about the Phoenician woman, who begged Jesus for mercy and help for her daughter, even though the Savior was sent to the people of Israel. But she knew that Jesus was to be the light and salvation of the Gentiles too. Last Sunday we saw Jesus cast out a demon from a mute man, and then teach with such authority that people were amazed at what He revealed from the Scriptures. In each of these lessons we see Jesus fulfilling specific prophecies of the Old Testament that were intended to enable the people of Israel to recognize the Savior when He appeared. Today we hear of the feeding of the five thousand in the wilderness, and see yet another proof that Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah.

I

In each case the Sunday lessons show us a specific mark of the promised Messiah foretold in the prophecies of the Old Testament. The Savior would be fully human, tempted in all ways as we. He would be the blessing that God promised Abraham

would be given to “all the families of the earth.” He would trample our enemies, the greatest of whom is Satan, under His feet and destroy the root cause of sin and all its terrible consequences. Today, in fulfillment of Moses’s prophecy, Jesus miraculously feeds thousands in the wilderness just as Moses had done so long ago, showing that He is indeed the prophet **like Moses** who God promised would come into the world to lead His people to the true promised land, heaven.

Dear friends in Christ, as we draw nearer and nearer to the gates of Jerusalem and Jesus’ triumphal entry on Palm Sunday, God grant that more and more we too will see in this Man our promised Savior, see that He is the great Shepherd of our souls, and trust Him in our every trouble and temptation - especially when we come into the valley of the shadow of death. For there He who conquered sin and death for us will shine most brightly for us.

In the first lesson for today, from the prophecy of Isaiah, we heard how the Father spoke to His eternal Son, saying, “In an acceptable time I have heard You, and in the day of salvation I have helped You; I will preserve You and give You as a covenant to the people, to restore the earth, to cause them to inherit the desolate heritages; that You may say to the prisoners, ‘Go forth,’ to those who are in darkness, ‘Show yourselves.’ They shall feed along the roads, and their pastures shall be on all the desolate heights. They shall neither hunger nor thirst, neither heat nor sun shall strike them; for He who has mercy on them will lead them, even by the springs of water He will guide them.” (Isaiah 49:8-10) Can you hear echoes of the 23rd Psalm in Isaiah’s words? You can, can’t you?

The prophecy speaks of a day when God’s Son would appear visibly to lead His people as their Shepherd King. At that time He would proclaim the good news of peace and forgiveness to those imprisoned by their sins. He would say to them, “Your sins are forgiven you, go in peace.” At that time His truth would shine on all those who are in the darkness of sin. He would say to them not “depart from Me you who sin and do evil,” but “Show yourselves”, “Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28) As they followed Him from one place to the next to hear the beauty of His words, He would care for them as a shepherd cares for His sheep. He would tend them when they were sick, feed them when hungry, and guide them into the way of truth.

II

We read, “Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased. And Jesus went up on a mountain, and there He sat with His disciples.” (vv. 2-3) He sat on these “desolate heights,” just as Isaiah foretold. There with His disciples He “lifted up His eyes, and seeing the great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?’ But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.” (vv. 5-6) Of course Christ knew what He would do. He would do what was prophesied of Him. This very mountain would become their pasture, as Isaiah had foretold; and so He told the people to sit down, “there was much grass in the place.” He would feed them. He would feed them as God had fed their ancestors in the wilderness through Moses.

Looking not only at St. John's account of these things, but at St. Matthew's also, which contains other details, we gain more insight. After Jesus took the portion of food brought to Him by a young lad, it says, "And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and **looking up to heaven**, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes." (Matt. 14:19) Why did He look up to heaven? Well, what did Isaiah say? Who would be listening to Him in this the "day of salvation?" Who would help Him who was sent as a covenant to His people? The Father in heaven would listen, and would help. Dear friends, the salvation of mankind came about not by the will of the Son, but by the will of the Father also, who had determined to show mercy to sinful man. Everything Jesus Christ, the Son of God did, was in accord with the will of the Father, as He told the people many times. All He did had been foretold by the Holy Spirit, who spoke to the people of Israel through the mouths of the prophets of the Old Testament.

You see, when Jesus fed the five thousand, He did so in fulfillment of prophecy. He did so as the "Angel of the LORD" whom Abraham, Isaac and Jacob both knew and trusted. He did so as the One, who had led His people out of Egypt in the pillar of smoke and fire, who kept them alive for forty years in the wilderness by giving them food from heaven. Jesus was the One Moses promised the people would one day appear in their midst in fulfillment of prophecy, and Himself lead them out of death into the promised land of heaven. Now this prophecy was being fulfilled in their sight on the desolate heights. God **had** appeared among His people. This was now the "acceptable time," the "day of salvation." God was leading them in person just as Moses had promised. He fed and cared for them just as Isaiah had foretold. His people were to see Him for who He truly was, the great Shepherd of Israel, the One whom Abraham knew and believed. They were to believe in Him, watching in wonder and faith as He went on fulfilling one prophecy after the other, until only the last prophecy remained - that He would die carrying all their sins, and then rise from death on the third day.

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So, dear friends, we continue following Jesus to the gates of Jerusalem, listening to His word each Lenten Sunday, until we see His suffering as the sacrificial lamb condemned for our sins, hear His words of forgiveness even as He is nailed to the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," and feel His final, triumphant cry, "It is finished." We follow Him until we see our full salvation in the fulfillment of God's every promise to us on Easter morning.

Lord Jesus Christ, great Shepherd of Israel, guide us to the promised land, feed us along the way with Your forgiveness, love, and mercy. Feed us until we want no more. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria