

In Nomine Iesu

The Seventh Sunday after Trinity 2024 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 Eden man’s food came with little work. Eden was fruitful and produced abundantly. There were no storehouses, no preservatives, nor of course refrigeration, 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 the knowledge of good and evil, eating 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 began to decay around him. He stood miserable in his nakedness, overwhelmed with regret. He is the perfect picture of the human condition, one we his children increasingly do not want to contemplate.

I

Yet God’s mercy is past all understanding. He did not abandon Adam and Eve the way we would abandon someone who showed any sign of unfaithfulness to us. By His grace, we still eat, and so go on breathing and walking. The earth still produces its fruit. Now, it’s true that the earth exacts a certain 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 seed 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 it is also true that the earth is no longer the garden planted by God and overseen by perfect Adam, where work is joy. Today man must still 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 rendered inedible or even stolen by others.

Man thinks his labor is the key. He tends to think that he himself has put bread on his table, that it came to be there by his effort and wisdom. Farmers sit in the local café on a late fall day, drink coffee, and discuss the harvest they’ve just brought in. They judge each other as farmers based on the straightness of rows, the condition of machinery, the yield per acre, the profit of the farm, and the choices each has made to plant this or that

crop for the coming year. They bring their wisdom and technology, their skill and discipline to bear, and bring home a harvest. Then they share their experience at the end of the season. And they learn to 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. Those who do not experience this process fall into the trap even more easily.

But it never was man's 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, and still preserves them," as we learned in the catechism; furthermore it continues, "He richly and daily provides me with food and clothing, home and family, property and goods, and all that I need to support this body in life." In other words, all that we have and all that we make use of are gifts of God. It is also He who reins in the consequences of Adam's fall on the forces of nature. Every community is always only a single hurricane or catastrophic forest fire or uncontrollable disease away from disaster, epidemic, and famine. Furthermore, the effect of sin on the heart of man has given us crime in our streets and in our boardrooms, terrorism that has touched our homeland with unexpected and sickening results, and war in distant places that begins to look like a real threat to us. Without peace and stability, which are the true blessings of the rule of law, our farmers would tend the fields with weapons at the ready as some do in other countries. Yes, all good things we have come from God.

There is great comfort in our Lord's feeding of the four thousand as we face the reality that we live in the midst of a decayed and dying world – a world in which we are not in control, a world in which the sons and daughter of fallen Adam dwell in the shadow of death. Here no police force or legislation, no army or array of spy satellites can make us completely safe. Even if war and terrorism would cease – and they will not - tsunamis and hurricanes will come, volcanoes will erupt and forests burn, men will steal, cheat, lie, and kill one another because of their greed, pride, and lust. And on top of all that, our own personal sins, treachery, betrayal, selfishness, and pride, cry out for judgment and condemnation. We deserve to be abandoned to the devil and his angels for all the evil we've done. The horror and chaos of all the freshly erupted wars in Palestine and around the Red Sea are not hell on earth, however terrible they are. There is no hell on earth and, in fact, those in hell would gladly trade their lot for mere terrors of earth.

Despite the fact that every one of us deserves judgment and condemnation, we are here. We live, breathe, and, yes, 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. He does it 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 is. 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 the wind and waves, the guns and bombs, the lies and threats, the 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 **He has created** in your heart, His own dear children in whom He is well-pleased. He looks at you, and He sees only the bright, shining righteousness of His own Son. You He desires not to see faint in grief or terror, in fatigue or famine, but better that than you become complacent, forgetting your

dependence upon Him; better that you faint or tire or suffer than that you stray from the path and lose your soul. And even when you faint and falter He still feeds you, provides for you, comforts you, and loves you. Always He welcomes you back when, after you have fallen, your faith reaches out once more to Him who alone gives what is good.

Some in the crowd He fed that day in the wilderness would agree with His accusers and judges on the day He was crucified. They would choose a murderer to go free in His place. And even if many of the 4000 did not agree with, participate in, or directly 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 couldn't or wouldn't 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. He loved them to the end. He provided for them in life and in death. He gave His life for the sins of the whole world. His compassion is without end, and His resurrection the life and the hope of all who believe in Him, even while they endure and suffer here.

Here is the comfort: We are not in control, God is. His ways are past finding out. But wherever men eat, 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 would welcome to Himself murderers and terrorists, because He became flesh and gave Himself for them as well. He rejoices when they repent and believe. For unlike the god of Mohammed's foolish and malevolent imagination, our God truly is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the promised Savior, who died but now is alive. He takes no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but would have all turn and believe in Him.

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. No, for that cup His Son has drained. Because of the life, death, and rising from death of His Son, God has declared you to be without sin, beyond the reach of judgment and condemnation. He has laid His claim upon you. He has called you to be His, for you are baptized in the name of His beloved Son! You He welcomes into His presence, laying His hand 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. That, dear friends, is a far greater honor and miracle 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; and it will welcome you into paradise. So, be patient. Trust in Him who rules all things for the sake of those who are His; unending rest and plenty will come to you. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria