

Pastor T.C. Arnold
4th Sunday in Lent
Exodus 16:4-8
March 30th, 2014

When we teach confirmation to our kids we cover all six chief parts of Luther's Small Catechism. We learn about the Creed – our profession of the Christian faith. The Creed, of course, is broken down into three articles – each focusing on a person of the Trinity. The first article of the Apostles' Creed is about the Father – *"I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth."* In this section we learn about how God – as maker of heaven and earth – also provides for us all that we need for body, soul and life. I show a picture-slide to the kids of the providing hands of God that are holding a family, food, house, home, animals all the things one needs for this life that God provides.

That picture-slide is based on how Luther describes what the first article of the Creed means. If you would, please turn to page 322 in your hymnal. You will want to keep your hymnal handy this morning as we will be referencing it again soon. Let's look at the first article's meaning – the first two paragraphs and let's speak them together...

"I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them.

"He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life."

God reaches down with His providing hand and gives me all that I have, as we just heard. God reaches down with His providing hand and gives His people what they grumble for. In the Chapter before the Old Testament text appointed for this day the people come to Marah after going three days without water. The water at Marah was bitter, they could not drink it. Israel grumbles against God. So, by God's own providence, He makes the water sweet. They drank and had their fill. The same happens here in chapter sixteen. In the midst of their grumbling, God hears them, has compassion on them, and feeds them. That's the kind of God we have.

And this is the kind of people we are. We who are well fed and comfortably provided for often ignore the spiritual hunger pangs of the soul – even if for a little while. Our belly is full and there is a roof over our head, yet we grumble. We grumble because they have more and we want that. We are never satisfied or content with the way God provides because there is always someone else who seems to be enjoying God's abundance more than us. Instead of yearning for what does not belong to us, we should rather yearn for what God promises to give – spiritual food for the sake of your soul.

Our Lord could see this about us. That's why He gave us these words in that special prayer while preaching the Sermon on the Mount. He told us to pray this way, *"Give us this day our daily bread."* Not tomorrow's daily bread, but today's daily bread (for the very reason that bread in the desert did not last). *"Give us this day our daily bread."* I'm not asking for my neighbor's – but just what you have set aside for me. Help me, Lord to realize this.

We are reminded of this in the catechism, so, again, I would like for you to turn in your hymnal – this time to page 324. Look at the bottom of the page, first column. Let's say that paragraph on the bottom together. (What does this mean?) *"God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would*

lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.” We would do well to turn from our grumbling and complaining and to cultivate the art of gratitude for the gift God gives us each day. This is the way St. Paul put it to the Colossians, *“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him”* (Col. 3:17).

Thanksgiving and gratitude is exactly what our Lord shows, even when our gratitude lacks and our complaining looms large. The Lord tells us, *“Lose the complaining and be grateful for what the Lord has provided for you.”* That’s different than what we see so often in our world today. But that’s okay, because even for us this is sort of a “different” kind of Sunday. For starters, this Sunday in Lent is called Laetare – or – “Rejoicing” Sunday. The name rejoicing may have been given to this day because this was the day the church rejoiced over the “soon-to-be” baptismal candidates (usually baptized at Easter Vigil) or because this was the Sunday that happened to fall closer to the time of spring. Either way, rejoicing and Lent don’t seem to go together. That’s different. Secondly, it’s a fifth Sunday in the month – that’s different. That only happens about once every three or four months. Then also we have Holy Communion at both Services. That’s out of the norm as well. Add to that we are using a liturgy in the Lutheran Service Book we don’t normally use. This day is a bit different all around.

Turn to page 157 in Divine Service, setting one. Look at the Lenten Verse at the top of the page. Let’s read it together. *“Return to the Lord, your God. For He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and abounding in steadfast love.”* Here’s something else a little different. Well, it’s not actually different at all – it’s what we would expect, even in Lent. We rejoice today because we have what this verse tells us. Our God, in the midst of penitence and solemnity, in the midst of our grumbling for bread in the desert of our lives, we have the same God that heard the cries of the children of Israel. Thankfully our God is gracious and merciful – when we have a heart for ourselves. He is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love – when we have the notion to lash out when God isn’t doing us any favors.

A slow to anger God – that’s what we have. While angry at the money changers in the temple, He patiently took their misdeeds with Him to the cross. He stood there silent before Pilate, patiently waiting to get back in front of that Sanhedrin influenced crowd to be condemned to death. His anger was slow and His steadfast love abounded while walking the long way around Jerusalem – already wounded by the beatings and floggings. We are quick to anger but our Lord is slow. Our love does not abound in steadfast ways. However, our Lord’s does, and thank God. Rejoice – He is gracious and merciful to sinners who deserve no such thing.

God provides the bread of life, for body and soul. Jesus is the bread of life, who feeds us. Rejoice, beloved in the Lord. The bread of life – that bread of life – is given for you for the forgiveness of your sins. What does that mean? Simple. Your God loves you to death so that your death means life. You live eternally in Christ. That’s the good food for our soul. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.