

Sermon for Lent 4 Laetare – John 6:1-15

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Imagine what it was like at the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 which our Gospel tells us about today. Our Lord was in Galilee. It was near the feast of the Passover, so there were many people around traveling on the roads to Jerusalem. Their interest was piqued by a miracle worker named Jesus. The crowd grew larger and larger and they came from all places. They looked for Him; they followed Him. And their reasons for being there were varied.

Some were curious, like today, when they see a crowd gather. They just wanted to know what was going on. Some heard the rumor of the great prophet from Nazareth and wanted to actually see Him. Some had already heard and seen Him and wanted to see Him again. They wanted Him to do something amazing for them. Others sought Him in order to entrap Him. They wanted to find something in what He did or said to accuse Him. And some were truly His disciples who sought Him whenever they had opportunity: sick and suffering sinners of all kinds as they were. His love drew them to Him.

When Jesus saw the multitude, He had compassion on them. Some time passed and it began to get late in the day. They had been outside the whole day. The place where they were was uninhabited; there were no cities close by. They had nothing to eat. So Jesus asks His disciple Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” [Jesus] said this to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.” Why the test? In what way would this benefit Philip and the other disciples?

The disciples began to do what we would have done: Philip makes an estimate. Andrew starts investigating. Philip figures that 200 denarii would hardly be enough to buy bread for these people (even if they had it). Andrew can’t find more than 5 barley loaves and 2 small fish. That’s as far as they got. Yet, how different it is for our Lord. This is a fact that His disciples often forget: Grain in the field, fish in the sea, and the people here present came into being through His Word and nothing else. In *His* hands 5 loaves and 2 small fish *are* enough, yes, even more than enough.

So He had the people sit on the grass. After He had prayed and given thanks to God, He took these 5 loaves and distributed them and kept distributing them through His disciples. They took them around to the people, until everyone had their fill. He did the same with the two fish. The whole multitude of people were filled. And there were still 12 baskets of fragments left over.

Why are we talking about this today? Why 2,000 years after the feeding of the 5,000 took place do we recount this story? So that we too can know and trust in our Lord. Do we trust Him? Or do our thoughts and concerns about day-to-day living and temporal things consume us? Do we forget that God has everything to do with our day-to-day lives in providing for us?

Martin Luther’s mealtime prayer begins with the words of Psalm 145, “The eyes of all look to You, O Lord, and you give them their food...” For many people, functionally their prayer for receiving God’s gifts is only this: “The eyes of all look ...” and they leave off the “...to

You, O Lord.” They look to the refrigerator; they look to the drive-thru lanes; they look to the pizza delivery guy. But we too are not immune from forgetting that God still has all these things in His hand. Everything good gift comes from Him. In spite of the fact that in the First Article of the Creed we confess our faith in God the Father and say that we believe it is God who provides us with all that we need to support this body and life and who guards and protects us from all evil, it’s still money that we would rather rely on and in it find our secure friend. “Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” And we have failed to flee Philip’s faithless financials.

The detriment of living in a wealthy country is that we don’t notice our need for a Savior. We can find peace and safety in our stuff. We’re not lacking anything – we don’t need anything. But we should ask ourselves – what do you have that can’t be taken away, and we know one day, will be taken away? Some of us already deal with physical hardships. We value a pain-free day, which many of us take for granted. Some of our nearest and dearest live under a cross of suffering and illness. In some cases, we can see that the road ahead isn’t long for them. Some of us are concerned about tomorrow’s uncertainties with our jobs and in our God-given earthly callings.

What’s more, whoever we are, all of us have born the temporal consequences of our sin currently or in days gone by. Some sins were long forgotten. Now they return and won’t go away. They crop up on our conscience and will not leave. We go about our daily work as usual, though secretly we’re unable to sleep and we’re anxious. Everyone will find himself in one of these situations, but in various ways. Everyone knows some kind of need or concern. Where do we turn for help?

Our natural inclination is to turn to what we can see and understand. We turn to our cleverness. We look to our success. We trust in “the future” that will make it better for us. Or we just try to forget. If that doesn’t work, we try to change for the better. We try to reconcile ourselves to God by putting our confidence in our own improvements. But it’s useless. Honestly, we can’t even stand up to the demands of our own conscience, let alone God who requires perfect holiness. Sin is not taken away by human power. Perhaps you can dam the stream for a little while, but you can’t stop the source. You can ease the guilt and the shame for a time, but our old nature remains and its final tidal wave will be worse than at first.

We must learn sorrow. We must learn shame. We must acknowledge our great idolatry. We must ask forgiveness for it. We must recognize that we creatures and are not in control but only our Living and Almighty God is. He directs and distributes as He will. He lets our plans succeed. He lets our plans fail. He establishes the work of our hands. He gives us work to do. He wants us to be diligent in our work. He wants us to be careful, considerate and faithful in the abilities, resources, and work He has given us. But worry? Control? What our work will bring about? These He keeps for Himself. We’re delusional to think otherwise. He will provide for all our needs. So we are free and we ought to live like it under the protection of our Heavenly Father!

If any affliction to our health, if any need to our well-being comes which we have experienced, are experiencing, or will experience, then we should seek help from Christ by whom we have access to God the Father. Even though we have our means and abilities that He

has given us, we should still trust Him alone. He knows what earthly possessions we have, how we use them, and what is good for us to have. He knows exactly what we are like in our work, in our homes, in our hearts. He knows our circumstances. Down to the smallest, most insignificant details, He knows our needs and sorrows, our worries and anxieties. Do you think His power and ability are less than when He healed the sick and fed thousands? No way! He helped all who came to Him. He invited them to come. That's what He still does for us today. He's by our side whenever we are weak. He knows our pain.

You walk with sorrows and worries, with questions and heavy thoughts. Yet, you are not alone. He is near you, even if you don't think about it. He knows exactly your situation, for you and for all your family and friends. Learn from the feeding of the 5,000 what you can expect from Him. He will do everything you need.

This is precisely why our Lord came into the world – to save lost sinners as you and I are. He has mercy on us and loves us. If you could save yourself, He would not have needed to come and save you. He still has compassion just as He did for the 5,000 plus in the wilderness. Christ has taken our sins upon Himself and carried them and atoned for them in order to save us. The Word is out: the punishment that we deserve because of our faithlessness is carried out on Him. Now we have peace and healing in His wounds. Now God greets us with peace. Now He gives us rest for our souls. Now we are confident in Him.

In that crowd of 5,000 plus there were countless needs of every type and degree. Emotional, physical – all kinds of hardships they faced. But who could help? Who could know them all? Only Christ. And His remedy covered them all: Bread and fellowship with God. And while this answer may have seemed short-sighted and simple for the multitude of maladies in Galilee, it still is the answer that is more than enough for us today – Bread, wine, Body, Blood: fellowship with God. In this sacrament, we are forgiven and made complete in Christ.

So talk to Him. Pray to Him with all your concerns. Ask Him for help and wait for Him. But don't expect that He will help you in the exact way you've figured out. Let Him be in control. Your help is coming for your needs both great and small. He promised it. So it shall be. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠