

Sermon for Trinity 7- Mark 8:1-9

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

“In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, [Jesus] called His disciples to Him ...” We’re told a great crowd of people had followed our Lord out into the wilderness. They were there to hear His preaching and teaching and see His healings and miracles. We could gloat over how pious and devoted these particular faithful followers of Christ were, but let’s be serious: they had been without food for 3 days. You know what you’re like if you miss a meal or 2: a little on edge, to say the least; quick-tempered and quick to snap at others would be more accurate. Sure, we can hide our hostility from strangers, acquaintances, and coworkers, but once we get around our family and those who know us well: Watch out!!! Well, imagine missing 3 days’ worth of meals! 4,000 short-fused husbands yelling at their wives, 4,000 short-tempered wives screaming at their husbands. Bickering children slapping each other and pulling each other’s hair. Brothers and sisters hanging up on each other, texting cruel things, and slamming doors. Yep, we’re not very far off.

Honestly, it’s no wonder our Lord had mercy on these people! “I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat.” Notice Jesus’ words: “I have compassion ...” Not “I pity them” or “I have sympathy for them.” Pity and sympathy are cerebral terms. They take place up here, not here. A person can feel them for a moment, and then walk on by without even thinking about that situation again. This is by no means what our Lord experienced in today’s Gospel. “I have compassion ...” said the Christ, and His compassion always moves to action. In fact, the Greek word used here for “having compassion” comes from the noun, “Splongkna,” which frankly has no English equivalent. The best we could define “Splongkna” is a deep, deep compassion that comes all the way from down in your guts and bowels. The word “Splongkna” actually originated from the ritual of ripping the innards out of a sacrificial animal and splattering them on the ground. The deep-seeded compassion that our Lord felt necessitated His action. So what now?

“... [I]f I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away.” These people need to eat, but remember the scenery: they’re in the desert wilderness, in a dry wasteland. A wave of doubt sweeps over the disciples: “How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?” The disciples expose their unbelief in broad daylight. If they had seen bakers’ stands and fishermen’s booths before their eyes, they would most certainly had assurance that everyone could be fed. But in the moment, they saw nothing before their eyes except sand, sun, sky, and starving humanity. Their assurance was gone. As far as they knew, they and these people were going to die in the wilderness.

But has not the desert view of life also starved us into doubt and despair? When sons and daughters move away from home and move away from the faith. When the doctor’s diagnosis is more than we or our loved one can bear. When God hasn’t provided a spouse, or family, or friends in the midst of loneliness. It seems He doesn’t hear our

prayers and our cries for help. It's like He doesn't care about us. All we see is the inevitable dismal results of this life's course, all the while forgetting God's eminent and always timely intervention.

Saint Paul's words in our epistle are a good reminder to us now: "For the wages of sin is death ..." because death and sin is all that we see with our mortal eyes in this desolate world, "... but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." There it is. God's ultimate "Splongkna," His pouring out of compassion, for the entire human race: that means us. The Son was sent to die on the cross, outside of Jerusalem, on a desolate hill called Golgotha. All we see is a dying man, yet the reality is that this God-man has taken our sins and doubts upon Himself. This is the same Jesus we are given today. How can that be?

Our Lord's "Splongkna," His deep compassion, necessitated His action: He was going to provide bread for the 4,000. And He did. This is a historic fact verified by the Holy Scriptures. The Scriptures also recount that He did so using only 7 loaves of bread and a few small fish. These 7 loaves Christ miraculously multiplied to so that all ate and were satisfied and there was even 7 baskets full of leftovers! Now the number "7" also has symbolic meaning throughout the Scriptures. "7" reminds us of God's miraculous work in creation, and rested on the 7th day. We're reminded also of the 7 churches of Revelation, where the Son of God was present. "7" expresses God's miraculous work in the lives of His people, even us. How?

Because the number "4,000" is another number of Biblical proportions. 4 is a number of completeness as in the "4 corners of the earth" or "all of the earth." "1,000" also is a number of God's complete perfect work. So 4,000 certainly included those fed with bread 2,000 years ago, but also we who are fed with God's bread today. The miraculous Body and Blood of Jesus is our food today, freely given for you in this place and wherever Christ is preached in purity and truth. He is the living Bread that comes down from heaven, and whoever eats of it will live forever. In Him, your sins are atoned for and your eternal life is secure.

The last little detail of today's gospel is Christ sending the 4,000 away. Yet these people are not sent away empty or lacking. And neither are we. In fact, we too depart in peace according to God's Word, for our eyes have seen God's salvation, which He prepared for us before the face of all people. We too go forth in God's compassion—compassion to be shared with others in our lives who suffer and need our help. "... [N]ow that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life." Amen.

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