

Sermon for Trinity 7 – Mark 8:1-9

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

It was perfect. The Lord God planted a garden in Eden and He placed Adam there, the very man Whom He had created. Adam breathed in his lungs the breath of God, which was also perfect. The trees were stunning to see. The fruit of them was the best food. A river flowed through Eden, and it was also perfect. There was gold and precious stones. All of it was an inheritance and a free gift. What's more, God also blessed Adam with Eve, his wife—a person who was totally different, but paradoxically completely compatible. It was perfect.

But then doubt started to creep in. Was there more to life than this? What about that tree over there? The one God said not to eat from? Why would He say that? Why does He hold all the cards? Does He really know what's best for me? Let's try it and see!

So man went his way. Fig leaf loincloths and hiding in the trees. Maybe God won't notice ... Maybe He'll forget about us. They thought that there was no way to fix this situation. And yet he did. For He is the God of impossible situations. He gave them the promise that Jesus would crush death and Satan forever.

Fast forward 4000 yrs. It was perfect—learning, living, and loving the teachings of Jesus for 3 whole days. He was their Savior, not just for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles who likely made up most of the 4,000 men who gathered around Jesus. We can project this from the location where His ministry was happening in this instance: the Decapolis—a known Gentile region. But as the days passed by, the provisions for food began to dwindle and eventually run out. And this was a dry and desolate place—not the green grassy Galilean landscape where Christ had fed the 5,000 Jews. So Jesus had compassion on them. And not just your average compassion from a distance: the heart-wrenching, gut-spilling mercy that necessitates action—what the Greek New Testament calls “Splonknidzomai.” So Christ told his disciples that these people must not go away hungry and faint on the way. They must have something to eat.

So then doubt creeps in on the disciples: “How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?” Unless the menu is dirt and rocks today, these people will have empty bellies. They will hunger. They will faint. They will starve. They will die. All is lost. An inventory of the food they do have reveals 7 loaves of bread and a few small fish. And this is a drop in the bucket of 4,000+ empty stomachs. The disciples thought, this is an impossible situation. There is no way to fix it. And yet He did. For He is the God of impossible situations. Jesus gave thanks. He broke the bread. He blessed the fish. He gave them to the disciples to distribute to the crowd. No combines. No trucks. No grain processers. No ovens. Only at His Word was the crowd filled with bread and even had 7 baskets left over!

Fast forward another 2,000 years. Here we are. And life is far from perfect. We're not the people we planned and hoped we would be. Maybe our marriage isn't what we thought it would be. Maybe God hasn't even blessed us with a husband or wife. We live in desolation and loneliness. Perhaps there's health complications for us or worse, for someone whom we love dearly and can't bear the thought of losing them. Maybe we've loaded ourselves down with debt and bills. Whatever the case may be—we've been burned in the past. In many situations, we have ourselves not added a little bit of grief to our lot by our own thoughts, words, and misdeeds.

Whether you've been there in the past, are living it right now, or dread the future—we see the impossible situations. Then doubt starts to creep in. Does God really know best? Does He even care about me? Why hasn't he provided me with what I need? What have I done that merits the hardships I face? Why must I suffer so?

How often do we, who have been redeemed by Christ, forget God's provision and doubt His help for us? Should not His ongoing care for us have been indelibly imprinted on our minds long ago? The answer to these questions is found in today's Gospel. And it's important that we hear this story of Jesus feeding the 4,000 regularly. Here we receive comfort against the temptation to worry and doubt God's provision. Our God is the God of impossible situations. He made an abundance out of 7 loaves. Even as the multitude in the Decapolis wilderness were fed, Christ still feeds and nourishes us in our own desolation with His Word and Body and Blood.

So often we forget that. Sometimes we imagine Jesus sitting off somewhere on the rim of a distant galaxy. We think that He has left us alone to struggle with our own fears and doubts. Then we are plagued by sin and temptations to sin with nothing but our own courage and inner strength to carry us through. We try to be more godly people, but fall flat on our faces. As St. Paul said the good things we want to do, we don't do, and we wind up doing the evil things we don't want to do. Our inner strength is pretty flimsy when it comes to building a relationship with God.

But in Christ we have a sure foundation. He still looks on us with heart wrenching mercy and compassion. Jesus feeds us in the desert places of our lives, when every hope is gone and life is impossible. He still is the God of impossible situations. He still feeds us. You might think you're deserted, but you're not. To us sinners weighed down with guilt of the past or imprisoned in the bondage of present temptation, he says, "You're mine! You're free your chains! Go and sin no more!" To our hearts weighed down by shame or sorrow, or stressed out by the anxieties of life, He says, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." At the times when we are in deserted places, Jesus still feeds us with forgiveness, life, and salvation. You are perfect because of Him. Amen.

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