

**Lectionary Readings:** Isaiah 55:1-5; Psalm 136; Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14:13-21

**Sermon Title:** *Bread Aplenty*

**Prayer:** *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of [our] heart[s] be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, [our] Rock and [our] Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)*

**Salutation:** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:2)

**Text:** The Word from God through which the Holy Spirit comes to stir our hearts for the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost is from our Gospel Reading: the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 14th chapter.

**Introduction:** Dear friends in Christ, the catechism teaches us in the First Article of the Creed, and, too, in the Lord's Prayer petition – “*give us this day our daily bread*” – that we acknowledge that each day, our food comes not from the fridge or the grocery store, but from the Giver of all good things. This is one reason we pray before and even after meals – to acknowledge and give thanks for such blessings.

Yet, sin is always there – crouching at our door – tempting us. There are temptations of:

- Greed.
- Wastefulness.
- Worrying about the future.
- Not being content in the confidence that the Lord will give us what we need.

**I.** In our text, the people who ate the miraculous fish and loaves that day were no different. If we were to read the parallel account of John 6, we'd see the people chasing Jesus around, trying to make Him king by force – a “*bread-king*” – Who kept their bellies always filled. But they miss the point. Do we?

The Bible tells us, Jesus Christ Himself is the Bread of Life (John 6). For:

- He Himself is the only true sustenance for the soul.
- His bodily death on the cross, His shedding of blood, His atonement for our sins is bread for the soul.

You see, the atoning work of Jesus alone satisfies the deepest hunger of the human soul:

- Without such food, there is no life in us anyway.
- Without the cross you have, ultimately, no need of bread for the body.

Just as there were more leftovers in the baskets than the food they started with that day, we see that Jesus' provision is overly abundant. That He gives all that we need and more:

- He provides for the salvation of our souls, as well as the resurrection of our bodies.
- And He sustains us with blessings too many for us to gather up in baskets. Blessings:
  - Physical and spiritual.
  - Temporal and eternal.

Indeed, all we need and more from Christ, crucified for sinners.

*II.* And yet there are still more lessons to draw from this miraculous feeding long ago. Let's consider four:

- We are dependent upon Jesus. Without Christ, we have nothing. We are nothing. We must look to Him for all good things. This goes for the mundane food and clothing as well as the salvation itself. It's not as if Jesus gets us started and then it's up to us.

Rather, we are and we ought to depend on Him for daily bread, the air we breathe and the lungs to breathe it in. Furthermore, we have no more reason to expect any of this than the people He fed would expect a full and free meal – except that we know the Giver gives abundantly and loves to provide for our needs.

And it goes for our spiritual nourishment as well.

- We cannot come to faith without His Spirit Who calls us.
- We cannot make a decision to follow Christ that is of any value, but instead He chooses us.
- We cannot bring any good works that will wipe out our bad works and tip the balance in our favor – but only Christ's righteousness can suffice.
- And we cannot pay enough to cover our debt – only the blood of Christ has such value.

Therefore, we depend on Him entirely. And here we have even more reason to depend on Him – for we have strong promises of forgiveness, salvation and eternal life with our God. Life in this world may bring trouble and hardship and nakedness and danger or sword. But no one can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ! (Romans 8:39).

- Jesus has compassion. When Jesus arrived at the shore for His time alone, He saw a huge crowd that also was hurting. He saw a world of demands – the disabled, the poor, the diseased.

On that day, these were the people who struggled along the dusty road on the northwestern side of the Sea of Tiberias:

- They needed to talk with Jesus not only because they sensed their lostness, but because they knew that Jesus had something they needed.
- They knew their sinfulness.
- They had heard of a loving God.

As those people needed Jesus, He obliged to their needs, as sheep without a shepherd. Although, upon seeing those hurting people:

- He could have changed His course and kept on sailing.
- He could have said: *“Don’t bother me. Can’t you see that I am grieving the death of John, my fellow coworker?”* Or: *“I can’t answer the phone; I’m busy.”*

But what does Jesus do?

- He had compassion on the crowd.
- He began to heal and to teach them.

You see, Christ always has compassion on those in need. He never turns a cold shoulder to one who has faith and seeks His aid:

- This doesn't mean you will always have plenty and will never be in want of bread, or health, or that no sorrow will ever come your way.
- It doesn't mean the Christians will never suffer.

But it does tell us where to go with our suffering, and Who has the only and final answer to it, and the inclination to do us good. In times of crisis we too need solitude and a place for prayer with our heavenly Father.

We have problems that often overwhelm us:

- There are family problems, personal challenges, and health issues.
- For many of us there are life and death concerns for ourselves as well as our loved ones.
- Often, the busyness of our lives does not allow adequate time with our Lord.

Like Jesus:

- We need to find a private place to be alone with our heavenly Father.
- We need time away from the crowd.

Maybe we can't sail across the sea. But we can find a quiet place to pray at home or take a moment at the beginning of the worship service. Jesus knows our suffering, for He suffered it Himself – He took it all to the cross. And so, He sympathizes with us in our weakness, in all things.

- Working through means. Jesus very well could have hand-fed each of those 5,000 plus all on His own, but He appointed the disciples to do it. He made them the go-betweens to distribute, to minister if you will, to the people.

However, we see the ineptness of the disciples by their misunderstandings and inabilities. They wanted limits on care for the people. As if to say to Jesus: *“Stop your ministry so they can go home.”* But consider, the people had walked miles. Supper time was near. So, the only reasonable solution was:

- To send them away.
- Let them buy whatever food they need.

However, Jesus says: *“You feed them.”* The disciples must have looked at each other in disbelief, as if to say: *“What? Maybe we didn’t hear you right! There are 5,000 people out there and we found only five loaves of bread and two fish.”*

So today does Jesus give the charge to pastors: *“You give them something to eat.”* How often though do we often feel ill-equipped to do it. However, we rely on the Word and promise of Christ that in Him there will always be plenty. As pastors distribute to you the blessings of salvation in Word and sacrament, even greater miracles ensue:

- Christ's abundance is given freely.
- Sinners are forgiven
- And faith is strengthened.

Yet, we can give only what we receive from Christ.

- Jesus taught the people first, then fed. Today He teaches, then feeds. As Jesus preached, taught – proclaiming the kingdom to these thousands, it must have been quite a day. He had much to say, and the people stuck around to hear it all. Then He fed them as only He could.

And we follow the same pattern today. We gather to Christ in Divine Service:

- Around His Word, to hear it, receive it in forgiveness.
- The Word is read and proclaimed, sung and prayed.
- And then He feeds. We come to the table to feast on the Word made flesh – and His body and blood are multiplied to far more than 5,000 times, and stomachs and souls are sustained.

**Conclusion:** Therefore, dear friends in Christ, whatever pangs of suffering you feel in your stomach or pangs of sin in your soul, turn again to the One Who provides bread – daily bread for our bodies, and the Bread of Life for our bodies and souls. He Himself is that bread – and He gives Himself freely, on the cross, in the Word, the water, and the meal of His altar. Come, eat and drink and live.

In the name of ✠ Jesus, Who forgives all your sins. Amen.

***To God alone the Glory!***