

Rev. Danny Mackey  
Fourth Sunday in Lent (Laetare)  
March 31, 2019  
John 6:1-15  
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

Jesus climbs up His mountain by the Sea of Galilee. Like a shepherd, He looks over the huge crowd following Him. Thousands—5,000 men, not counting women and children—are gathered below. 10,000 people could easily be on that hillside!

With tongue firmly in cheek, Jesus asks, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” It’s a trick question. Jesus already knows what He’s about to do. Teachers might call this a “teachable moment.”

Philip does some quick mental arithmetic: “Two hundred denarii”—that is, eight months wages—“would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” “Buy bread? Impossible!”

Andrew’s a bit more resourceful. He’s found a little boy carrying his lunch box. Five barley loaves and two fish. Barely enough to feed one or two people. More than enough for Jesus.

“Have the people sit down,” Jesus directs. “Now there was much grass in the place,” John tells us. Surely, the Good Shepherd makes His sheep lie down in green pastures.

Jesus takes the bread, gives thanks, and gives it out to the people. Same with the fish. Broken chunks of bread and pieces of fish Jesus distributes to the people. Every time they turn to Jesus, there’s more bread and more fish. The bread and the fish keep coming until everyone is full. No one goes hungry at the Lord’s table.

John mentions another table. The disciple tells us, “Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.” The Passover meal, where broken bread and the roasted lamb brought the exodus to you. When you ate the Passover, the exodus became yours.

It’s at another Passover meal the night Jesus is handed over to die on the cross. Once again Jesus takes bread in His hands. He gives thanks, breaks it, and gives it to His disciples reclining at table with Him. “Take, eat,” He says. “This is My body given for you.” He takes ordinary bread; with it He gives His own body as food. The bread-and-fish miracle pales in comparison. So great a gift from so little!

12 baskets are filled with leftover bread. This bread isn’t a snack for later, though.

Surely, this remainder of bread is a sign of God's abundant provision; however, it's more than that. It means that Jesus comes to save more than these thousands. Still others are hungry. Still others must be fed. The Good Shepherd has other sheep not of this fold. They will be gathered too. As Jesus says, "So there will be one flock, one Shepherd."

We are of those other sheep. We are of that one flock. We are hungry; we must be fed. Those 12 baskets are filled with bread for us and for all others whom Jesus draws unto Himself. "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing"—that is, "in order that none"—"may be lost."

Like a shepherd, Jesus looks over the world—Jesus looks over us. He beholds our needs and hears our pleas. He draws us unto Himself. He makes us to lie down in green pasture. He prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies—enemies both physical and spiritual. And we shall dwell in house, at His table, forever.

Jesus takes in hand a little boy's lunch and makes it a feast for over 5,000. Jesus has His people eat broken bread and roasted lamb, and over a million are rescued from slavery. Jesus takes a thin wafer of bread, a tiny sip of wine. He multiplies it beyond measure into a feast. With this feast of salvation all who partake of it are saved unto eternal life.

The crowd is impressed with the bread-and-fish miracle. "This is the Prophet we've been waiting for," they shout. They want to make Jesus king right then and there. Who can blame them? Politicians have run on the promise of a chicken in every pot. Bread on every table. Such a deal! Bread without limit, without work.

But the One who refused to turn stones into bread, also refuses to be a bread-king. Bread and fish you can have without Jesus. "God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people." All the things we want in life, we can have without Jesus. The only thing we can't have without Jesus is the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, salvation from death—table fellowship with God.

Jesus comes to set a different kind of table. He comes as the sacrifice that opens God's banquet table to sinners. He pours out His blood, in order that we eat and drink in His presence forever. Jesus sets a table that brings life and peace and forgiveness. Jesus restores table fellowship with God.

The world's tables look so much more impressive. At least on the surface. I wonder. If there had been a McDonald's by the Sea of Galilee, would the crowds have settled for bread

and fish from the hand of Jesus? Would we?

To many, Sunday brunch is much more attractive than the feast of God's Word and His Supper. We can hardly imagine a day without three meals. Skip a meal and our old belly-god starts grumbling. And yet, are we trying to live on one meal every two weeks or fewer from God's table? If we were speaking of temporal food, we'd call it an eating disorder. No wonder we are spiritually lifeless—no wonder our witness is weak, our prayer life anemic.

“Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” We are given to sit down at Christ's table and have Him break bread with us. We need fellowship with God. It alone is the food that can satisfy us both body and soul, even unto everlasting life.

What God provides Israel at the exodus, what Jesus provides the crowd on the mountain covered with green grass by the Sea of Galilee, He provides for us here...in this place...every Sunday. He gives us His Word. He gives us faith. He teaches us. He feeds us, much more than barley bread and fish—Jesus feeds us His body and blood.

Such a feast, such a table fellowship can be found nowhere else.

In Jesus' name.