

Rev. Danny Mackey
Seventh Sunday after Trinity
July 31, 2022
Mark 8:1-9
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

[Jesus said:] "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me know three days and have nothing to eat."

They'd been at it for a long time. Jesus was with a great multitude in the wilderness. He was preaching and teaching about the kingdom of God, about the forgiveness of sins through His upcoming death and resurrection. For three days He'd been preaching to them. He looked out on these masses of people hungry to hear God's Word and said:

"I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with Me now three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away."

What does it mean to have compassion? In Greek the word is *splachna*, which literally means that His innards, Jesus' guts were moved to help them. Jesus' compassion for the people, though, doesn't simply mean He has sympathy for them, or that He feels bad for them because they didn't have enough to eat. No, His compassion for these people moved Him to do something. It moved Him to not only feed them with the Word of God but to take care of their physical hunger as well. True compassion results in love in action.

Now let's consider these people in the wilderness for a moment. They'd come out to the wilderness to hear Jesus preach and teach to them. They'd been at it three days; and it's Jesus who feeds them. They didn't ask for it. He gave it to them. They are embodying Jesus' words in Matthew, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Contrast this with our own attitudes toward hearing God's Word. The way that you and I live and work is generally quite simple: you do what you need to do to make money, eat and have a roof over your head, a good car or truck in the drive—and everything we're told we need to do so our children have the same—and maybe a some toys or a vacation. After that, we see what God might have to say to us. Christ and His Word rarely have much priority in our lives. The Catechism says that "we should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it." We

may despise preaching and His Word by staying away from church, by coming and not paying attention, or by thinking that we know everything and don't need God's Word except when it's convenient.

This is perhaps the most obvious here in the summertime. Attendance at church goes down by about 35%. Now I would like to think that everyone who goes on vacation is going to church somewhere else on Sunday. I'm sure many do, but at the same time, many don't. It's very frustrating as your pastor. Not because I think you're bad people, but because I see you starving yourselves. When the summer comes, many of us take a vacation from hearing God's Word. It's important, but it's only important when it's convenient. The attitude so many have is "I go to church and receive Christ's body and blood, but only if it doesn't interfere with my weekend plans, or my sleep schedule, or whatever else."

This attitude, though, is how we basically view God. God will fit into my schedule. He'll work in this box, and if it costs more than that, takes a little more time, or just doesn't seem to work quite like I would like it, well, forget it. God becomes a merchant whom we patronize on occasion. We expect Him to remember our name and give us the goods, but we're hardly ever there. And God is also expected to serve everyone without discrimination and give them whatever they want, too. That's why unchurched people think they can just call up a preacher and get married in his church or have a funeral for a loved one. And why shouldn't they? After all, so many of our own church members act and think the same way.

It really goes back to the Garden. In our Old Testament reading, we heard how God placed Adam and later Eve into the Garden of Eden to tend it and take care of it. This Garden had fruit of every kind from the trees. They were beautiful; and they were wonderful to eat. This was how God made the Garden. But there was one tree they were not to eat from. They were not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This tree wasn't good for them to eat. This fruit would not bring life; it'd bring only death, only suffering and misery, only separation between a faithful God and unfaithful humanity.

We know what happened. Adam and Eve ate from that tree. Instead of hearing God's Word and trusting in His mercy, they chose instead to go their own way. They refused to hear the Word of God, and so their priorities, indeed their whole life changed. And it wasn't for the better.

Now what does that have to do with our Gospel lesson and Jesus' compassion on the crowds? The connection is this. The crowds weren't in the Garden where everything was good and perfect. They were in the wilderness, in the desert of their sins and death. They'd heard the message from Jesus that Paul says so well in our Epistle reading: "the wages of sin is death." In the desert they saw the wasteland of their sin for what it was: separation from God and from His good gifts of life and forgiveness.

In this wilderness, though, was a pretty major difference. They were in the presence of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It was like the Garden of Eden in the opposite. These people heard the Word of God, and even though they were in the wilderness, it didn't matter. Jesus words were like the richest feast they ever had. Jesus' Word was so rich that they forgot to eat for three days! They stayed with Him for three days, like Jesus lying in the tomb for three days, and came out victorious at the end. Jesus recognized that left to their own devices, they'd faint on the way home. He couldn't simply toss them out. No. He was their God—God of both their bodies and souls. Jesus fed them.

Now what does this have to do with you? My friends, this has everything to do with you. We live in the wilderness, in the desert of our own sin and self-destruction. We don't have to just look outside ourselves and at how insane the world has gotten. We need only look within. Our own hearts are so often a barren wasteland. We focus only on ourselves, without regard for Christ or for our neighbor. This is where we dwell. We are troubled beyond our ability to deal with. We see death not only around us, but within our limbs and within our hearts. That's the wage we earned. Because of our sin and hatred toward God. Yet St. Paul writes, "But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Jesus gives us life. A life full of promise and hope. In the desert of our sin, He has set a feast before us that is greater than anything we can imagine. People have asked me from time to time why we go to church. Well, we go to church because this is where God preaches to us and brings us back from the dead. We go to church because Christ longs to forgive our sins and feed us with His very body and blood. We go to church because that is who we are. The very word "church" means "called out." We are the called-out ones. We've been called out of the desert and wilderness of sin.

What happened in the wilderness all those years ago, Jesus repeats again and again today. In churches throughout the world, Jesus gathers His saints. He preaches and teaches

about the kingdom of God, about the forgiveness of sins through His victorious death and resurrection. He makes them to sit down, just as those 4,000 sat on the ground. He uses His ministers to distribute broken bread to feed His people. He satisfies them. All because of His overwhelming compassion. In this way, Jesus loves us the same way He loved them.

Being fed with Christ's Word and His Supper, we have the strength not to faint but to go on. We are given faith that looks beyond ourselves and our own problems and to see all the wonderful things Christ our Lord has in store for us and for the world. This is true refreshment for our souls. And this is what Jesus' heart and soul longs for us to have.

In His name.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ + Jesus.