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The Seventh Sunday after Trinity
July 18th, 2021
Mark 8:1-9

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, IN

Title: God Provides

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.” (Psalm 19:14)

Intro: The crowd of four thousand who followed Jesus were not only physically hungry, but their souls were starving for the Word of God. Four hundred years had passed between the last prophet and John the Baptist, and John was already gone, beheaded by Herod back in Mark chapter 6. The Jerusalem temple that Solomon built had been destroyed, and the new temple was not filled with the Cloud which used to be in the tabernacle and in Solomon’s temple, the Cloud that assured the people that God was present among them. God’s Word and God’s presence felt absent from the people, and they turned to the empty rules and practices of the Scribes and Pharisees for comfort. But now Jesus had come! He performed mighty miracles, cast out demons, healed the sick, and fed the five thousand. He spoke as one with authority. He preached with great wisdom, greater than the wisdom of the Pharisees who taught in the synagogues. Now the people were able to hear the proclamation of God’s Word like never before, a proclamation of freedom from sin through Christ into the righteousness that leads to salvation (Rom. 6:19).

I

So Jesus taught the people, feeding their souls with this very proclamation. He led four thousand people from Gennesaret, from Tyre and Sidon, and from other far places, to the Sea of

Galilee until three days had passed, and all the food that they brought was reduced to seven loaves of bread and a few fish.

Seven and a few were all Christ needed to create the feast for the crowd. After breaking bread and giving thanks, He gave it to His disciples, and His disciples took it and set it before the crowd, and the people were fed. What was once seven loaves of a meager meal was now seven baskets of abundance to feed many more. Now the people had been fed in their ears and in their mouths, and they could go in peace.

This miracle of feeding with bread is the lesser miracle in our reading. The greater miracle is the feeding of their souls with the proclamation of Jesus' death and resurrection. The Israelites who ate Manna in the wilderness lived for a time and then died. The crowd which ate the loaves of bread lived for a time and then died. No man can live on bread alone, but instead by every word from the mouth of God. Christ had compassion upon the starving multitudes who hungered for the Good News of Salvation. The loaves that He broke point us towards His body broken on the cross for all sins. On that cross was given the food of everlasting life, and this very food was handed to the disciples to set before the crowds of the nations. Christ has sent His disciples into all nations to the four corners of the earth, to baptize and teach them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. It is by such teaching that the crowds are fed, and their hunger satisfied.

II

We might feel distant from the four thousand. As we learn from Luther's Small Catechism, God has greatly blessed us in our bodily needs of food, drink, house, home, devout family, faithful rulers, good weather, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like. We don't have to travel a great distance to hear great speakers; we can watch them on the television, a

laptop, or a phone. Even when we travel a distance, food is readily available. There are McDonald's from New York to Texas, in Australia, in South Korea, and even in Israel! We have been blessed with comfort and relative prosperity in our time- and it is indeed a blessing- but it does make us feel distant from the hunger of the four thousand.

At the same time, we are not so separated from the four thousand in our spiritual food. They waited for the arrival of the Messiah. That Messiah is our Lord who has come, and we wait for the time when He will come again. They were comforted by prophecy; we are comforted by the fulfilment of the same prophesy. We hear the very same words proclaimed to them, that Christ died and was raised for our salvation, that we are no longer slaves of sin; we are children of God.

III

The same Christ who filled the crowd with good food also fills us with all that we need in body and soul. There is enough to feed four thousand groups of four thousand and still be left with baskets full. This leads us to ask: "Why do so many people still face starvation, not simply the hunger of the body from a famine in the land, but the starvation of the soul from a spiritual famine?" We often think of the spiritual famine in distant countries, which need missionaries and Bibles and aid. But we also must think of the spiritual hunger for Christ in our country, our state, our city, among our neighbors, and in our own households. Do we not see the signs of our neighbors' need? In our nation, laws and rules are being passed that go against what God has ordained as good. This is because our nation is filled with those who do not know God, nor what is good. In our cities, theft and rioting occurs. This is because our cities are filled with people who are enslaved to their sins of anger and greed. In our own households, children grow up and abandon the faith. This is because they no longer look to the One who gives us the faith. Indeed,

we can see the need for spiritual food in the world. It is so great that we ought to always be crying out to God for His compassion.

We read “Jesus looked upon the crowd with compassion.” In His compassion Christ, our Lord, gave bread to His disciples in order that they might set it before the crowd. And they set it before the crowd. In the same way, Jesus gave His preaching and teaching to the disciples in order that they might set it before all nations. And they set it before all nations. As this proclamation was handed to all nations, disciples were made from them. The very church that you are sitting in comes from that proclamation. Here we receive the very proclamation that Christ has died and been raised for our salvation, that we are no longer slaves of sin but children of God. Here we receive bread that is joined to Christ’s true Body and wine to His true Blood. Here is where we return so that we might not starve in our souls, that we might be filled with His Word.

As we ask God, “Lord, how will You feed the people?” we have our answer; the people are fed by Christ. As we ask “how will the bread reach the people?” we look to where the Word of God is proclaimed and taught. Just as fathers and mothers give their children meat and drink to grow their bodies, they also bring their children to listen to the food for their soul. Just as a neighbor will look after his neighbor to see that he hasn’t fallen physically ill, a Christian brother will look after his brother to see that he hasn’t fallen spiritually ill. Just as you keep watch for the lost child who didn’t return home, keep watch for your fellow children of God who have not returned to our home which is the Church of Christ.

If you are afraid that you are not sufficient to take care of one another, then you are correct. You are not sufficient. You can’t take on the burden of feeding the world because you are not the bread that brings life to the world. Christ is the one who bears that burden. As the

psalmist declares “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host” (Ps. 33:6). God has taken care of everything from the beginning, and He will continue to provide for the needs of His beloved children. We do not need to fear what the future will bring, because we know the one who brings the future. We do not need to fear where we will go or what we will do because God will guide our steps. We do not need to fear that our words will be insufficient to change the hearts of another, because it is not our words but the Word of the Lord and the Holy Spirit who will work upon the hearts of men.

Conclusion

We do not need to fear that God can’t satisfy our hunger, because God is always able to feed us with “the free gift of God” which “is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23). So now go in Christ, who has ordered all things for our good and will guide us throughout all our days.

And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.

[GOD PROVIDES

I God provides for the Crowd.

A With His Word

B With the loaves and fish

C With His body on the cross

II God provides for us

A in our bodily needs

B in our spiritual needs

III God provides for the many (the world)

A by sending the disciples

B by sending us]