

“Let’s Eat”

Mark 6:30–44



Dear friends in Christ, may God’s grace be with you!

Yes it is true, the most basic of all human necessities is food! I’m sure we all like it, when someone says: “let’s eat!” Without food you, well you know what happens. That’s why even in our Gospel reading for today we see how Jesus, the eternal Son of God, takes the time and effort to satisfy that most basic need, food!

But food also brings humanity to another level, brings family, community together. The most important events in one’s life are typically celebrated with food. Birthdays have cake; newlyweds join their guests at the reception for food and the ritually prescribed cutting of the cake. Even on occasions of sadness, such as illness or funerals, food is shared as a means of expressing love and care. Food and feasting are appropriate when celebrating the many milestones of human life and even friendship, as we go out with friends for a meal or even having coffee together and fellowship.

Mark, the writer of today’s Gospel reading, introduces us to an unexpected feast, a feast that gathers and feeds five thousand men in the wilderness. Nothing elaborate to be sure, in fact it cannot compare to the banquet and its delicacies for Herod’s birthday feast as we heard in the Gospel reading last week. (Mk 6:14–29). You may recall that John the Baptist lost his life because of that celebration. This feast starts with a 5 loaves of breads and 2 fish! And by contrast, at this feast no one died. And although simple is by far better than that empty caricature of one hosted by Herod, because it was truly a foretaste of the feast to come in God’s kingdom. Even the twelve apostles didn’t quite understand everything that took place on that grand occasion.

They had just returned from the Galilean towns and countryside after preaching the kingdom of God and casting out demons and reporting everything to Jesus, and after their report Jesus asks them to go somewhere to rest. “Come away by yourself,” Jesus said, “to a desolate place and rest a while” (v 31). So they get into a boat to sail to a quiet, restful place on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

But the crowds will have none of that. They somehow find out where Jesus and his disciples are heading and run there on foot ahead of them (v 33). Before the boat even gets to shore, the crowd is there waiting for Jesus. This is what we are told:

“When [Jesus] went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things” (v 34). One of the things that speak to me in this text is Jesus’ compassion! God does have compassion on here we see a sparkling example of divine compassion in action. Now imagine this, even in the midst of an increasing opposition to Jesus ministry and just after John’s unjust death for the sake of God’s Kingdom, where retaliation from God’s part is justifiable, what does Jesus do? He feels compassion for the crowd. Jesus is never too busy, never too distracted by other

things, to take care of us. The Lord feels compassion for us down to the depths of his soul.

But this is not just “O, I feel your pain” kind of expression, no, the one who will die for these sheep already, even now takes steps to relieve their distress. Compassion is sympathy and more, moved to action in order to relieve the person from their distress or suffering.

And what compassion does Jesus give? Shepherding, is one compassion. Herod certainly wasn't shepherding God's people. We saw what he did to God's prophet, John the Baptist, having him beheaded in order to preserve his reputation. The scribes, Pharisees, lawyers, and Sadducees all of those who were in authority were supposed to care for their people, to serve them to protect them, in other words to their shepherd. But what did they do? They left the flock to the predators of sin and despair and false hope, they oppressed them, they mistreated them! They provided no teaching in holy truths to secure their hearts and minds, they did not lead their people, God's people to participate in the divine things to strengthen their faith and protect their hearts. Instead they favored the oppressors, their prestige and position even at the cost of sacrificing truth and God's Kingdom, the beheading of John the Baptist is an example of that. In the end the people who they were supposed to be serving, was a flock of wandering sheep, easy prey for the devil, the world, and even their own sinful flesh. No wonder Jesus felt compassion to the depths of his soul.

Jesus “began to teach them many things” (v 34). Through the sound of Jesus' human words and ordinary vocabulary, God was speaking peace and deliverance into people's lives.

We fall into the trap of thinking of Jesus as being somewhere out there ruling the cosmos with uncontested might. And that's true enough. But to find God in his grace and mercy, you must go through Christ's humanity given to us through his appointed, tangible means: Word, Baptism, Absolution, and Supper. Today, God in Christ is present with us through common, ordinary things, covering us with his compassion.

Now, in our gospel reading we see that the disciples also had some compassion, however, and perhaps left everything to the Lord's compassionate teaching. But there's a problem. It's getting late; people are hungry. Vv 35–36: “His disciples came to him and said, ‘This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.’”

They heard the Word, but they understood also that people needed to be fed. Something like we do on Sundays when the sermon goes over limit, we begin to watch our watches to see the time, because well, time for lunch! Or brunch! The disciples' humanistic approach basically says, “Scatter the flock and let them fend for themselves!”

But no wonder the Prophet Isaiah “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord” (Isaiah 55:8)

Jesus and his twelve disciples are light-years apart from one another. Mark describes the difference with remarkable subtlety. The disciples instruct Jesus to send the crowds away so that the crowds can take care of “themselves” (v 36). That was the word they used, “themselves.” Not us, Jesus. It's not our concern. Let them do it. But Jesus issues a different command: “You take care of it!” The disciples bluntly say, “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?” (v

37). That's about what a day laborer would earn in six or seven months. "Really, Jesus, do you think six and a half months' worth of bread will take care of it?"

Jesus see how Jesus respond, he asks "How many loaves do you have? Go and see" (v 38). After some search, the disciples scraped up five loaves and two fish. The desert cupboard isn't bursting full with abundance! With those simple gifts, Jesus' compassion finds its way to the crowd yet again. All five thousand men are fed to the full. The loaves and fish never ran out. The room in people's stomachs filled up way before Jesus stopped giving. It was a wilderness feast.

The most basic of all human necessities is food. And Jesus, the eternal Son of God, takes the time and effort to satisfy that most basic need. He feeds them with food, fish bread.

Jesus, the divine Son of God in human flesh, will die on the cross to relieve sin's impact on everyday human existence—disease, hunger, thirst, nakedness—as well as sin's eternal effects.

We Christians are all too content thinking Jesus takes care only of our spiritual problems. He forgives sins; he comforts our afflicted conscience. But Jesus is concerned for the whole person, soul as well as body. Today's Gospel reminds us that the Lord's compassion extends over our physical and spiritual needs. We should not separate the two. Jesus is the compassionate Lord over body and soul. See how Jesus takes care of both soul and body in feeding the five thousand: After arranging them on "green grass" (v 39) in orderly groups of hundreds and fifties, Jesus takes the bread and fish, looks up to heaven, says a blessing, breaks the bread, and gives it to the disciples to distribute to the crowd. Through the disciples Jesus feed all of the five thousand people. In the same way today, yes God provides all for us, as we Martin Luther explains in the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread." In the explanation he says: "God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving." And he explains that "Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like."

And certainly provides to those who are in need, starving, here and everywhere, but He uses us His disciples to bring them "bread and fish." He wants us to bring God's compassion to those in need, let's not reject that, and lets not think that God will not use us, but that we would be willing to follow Him and obey his call.

Now, there is another aspect that we see in Jesus provision as well. In His Shepherding He provides compassion in the flesh. Yes blood and flesh, in and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion. When Jesus takes, blesses, breaks, and gives bread and fish to the crowds, he's foreshadowing what is to occur in the giving of the Lord's Supper.

Receiving the body and blood of Jesus isn't merely a nice remembrance meal. It's the compassion of Christ's cross being felt on your tongue, in your mouth, straight to your soul. It's a divine feast of Jesus' precious body and blood given for your body and soul in the present, the future, and into eternity.

Jesus promises to sustain our bodies this side of eternity with earthly gifts through godly vocations such as father, mother, workers, and government. But Jesus also promises to raise our bodies in the resurrection on the Last Day so we can live with him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness in both body and soul.

The Supper is a pledge and promise of earthly strength and divine forgiveness here and now, as well as assurance of a glorious, bodily resurrection on the Last Day.

Our needs—ordinary, common, and mundane though they be—are often provided for by Christ through the most unlikely of means. Five loaves and two fish feed five thousand men. What's most amazing is not the miracle—the crowd doesn't seem to know about the miracle—but the compassion that fuels the miracle. "Just bring what's here, and I'll use it," says our Lord.

It's tempting to think we're too small to make a difference here in our community, much less the world. But Jesus' compassion overrules our logical-sounding reasons as to why we're too small, too insignificant, to matter to God.

Jesus smiles and says, "Bring what you have here to me." He'll take us, bless us, break us for his purpose, and then give us to the world for the benefit and salvation of many in both body and soul. What matters most is Jesus' compassion. Come, then, dear people of God. Come to Jesus' feast and receive his compassion in body and soul. With him there's always enough to go around—enough compassion, enough forgiveness, enough of Jesus for every hungry mouth and heart. It's a feast after all! Amen.