

Sermon Trinity 7 2020

July 26, 2020

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, the feeding of the Four Thousand.

In the ministry of Jesus, it's not uncommon to see Him stealing away for some time to Himself. The demands of His ministry clearly weighed on Him and He sets a great example for us in the realization that we sometimes just need to seclude ourselves from the demands of the world and take a breath. It appears that today's Gospel lesson may actually have occurred at just one of those pauses. Here Jesus is and Mark tells us that **"again a great crowd had gathered"** and where are they? They are in the wilderness, in the **"desolate place."** Why, we could ask, are they in a desolate place? Well, it would seem that our Lord was doing just what I'm describing, and getting some peace and quiet for prayer. Or at least He was trying, until the crowds followed Him and gathered around Him as they were wont to do. And so much for quiet rest for the Lord. Already stretched, here He was stretched again.

I think our circumstances right now are putting many of us in a similar spot. Perhaps it's different in that since we're shut in our homes and secluded right now, it's not as though we can't take some moments and really appreciate the quiet of reading God's Word and praying—which if you're stressed about all that's going on right now and you're not taking time do that, do it. Reading the Bible is something all Christians should be doing. I marvel at the knowledge of some of our older members when it comes knowing Scripture. What a blessing—something that can be intimidating for those who are younger, but know that they older folks didn't get there overnight. Like they say, Rome wasn't built in a day. But I digress. In any case, our circumstances certainly are drawing us out, aren't they? It seems that just when we think we'll be able to get used to one thing, something else comes along. And when we sort of acclimate to that, everything shifts and we have to rebalance. Between viruses and pestilences and unrest and dust storms and hurricanes and murder hornets this time is constantly burdening us with more stress to the point it's easy to want to break.

A brother pastor noted this on his Facebook page this week, saying that he doesn't expect things to get all that much better soon. It's weighing on him. Thankfully, he noted, he knows that the reality of the situation isn't dependent upon his thoughts and opinions, nor upon how he feels about all this. Instead, it's reliant up on the truth of our Lord's authority over the entirety of heaven and earth. But still it bears its weight upon

our shoulders doesn't it? In that, I think we can relate to our Lord's need to get away that we see in the Gospel Lesson.

Or better yet, we can see that our Lord can relate to us. As we consider these people who have gone out so far to hear the teaching of Jesus, we can make an analogy to their journey home and our own journey in this life. We can see that Jesus speaks of them going on their way. He worries, "**they will faint on the way.**" They're in this desolate place, and some of them "**have come from far away,**" and so they won't make it if they're not cared for. So also, we journey. We journey on the way from our first death in baptism, the death of our sin, to the death of our bodies. And that journey bears its difficult moments for us, it bears those moments where we get weighed down.

But what does Jesus say about those He sees in this state? Like I said, He can relate to us, and that's the joy, right? What does He say? **I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat.** I have compassion on the crowd. I mention this word with some regularity, because it gets to the heart of our Lord's love and care for His people, but this is that word for compassion that comes from the guts. Jesus feels this compassion for these people in His guts. He sees that their journey is long, He sees that they could easily faint on the path and it pains Him. He doesn't want their harm, He doesn't want their demise and He feels that in His guts.

It's interesting how the Scriptures describe emotions. Sometimes things we get emotional about or things that we get riled up about, Scripture gives insight to show that this is less than desirable. Emotionalism and raw feeling aren't where our Lord's desire is for us. Passions and the drive from pure emotion is to be tamed. But when it comes to the aching we have for our neighbor, when we see them suffering that's something that should hit us in the gut, because that's how our Lord experienced it. And you can see it because He cares enough to provide for the needs of these people.

Of course, that's what our God does. His desire is that He would be our God and we would be His people, because as our God, His heart is to give to us, to provide for us, to care for us. Look at how you see this play out in the Old Testament. To draw a very direct parallel, think about the Israelites on their path, on their way from the Red Sea to the Promised Land—something I often point to as a picture of the Christian life: baptized in the Red Sea, cared for by God, and sustained unto life in the Promised Land, the Inheritance. And what does the Lord do for the people in the midst of that? Just as He gives bread to them in the wilderness in the Gospel Lesson, He provides bread for the Israelites. And how so? Miraculously. Manna. Appearing day in and day out. Miraculous care for them, making sure they're provided for. Making sure their bellies

will be sustained, that their shoes will not wear out and their clothes will not tatter. This is the heart of this God incarnate, “enfleshed” in Christ.

And lest we think that’s a unique circumstance, you see it again and again and again. You see it with Elijah fed by ravens. You see it with the judges and kings God gave to Israel, providing good kings after their kings would turn, or good judges redeeming the people when the people had rebelled. You see it with Daniel in the lion’s den, with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego whom He preserved in the fiery furnace. Over and over and over.

And you He provides for you. He takes your sin upon Himself on the cross. He dies for it. He provides for you the perfect life you need for eternity in heaven. And just as the wages of sin is death, He steps in front of the bullet of death in your place. He didn’t deserve the death, but He took it for you. He didn’t deserve the discomfort of this life, but He took it for you. He felt your suffering in His guts and He took it and worse that you would have an eternal home with Him in the New Heavens and the New Earth; a new life where you are raised in His resurrection. Provided for, cared for, loved for eternity.

And as I say all of this, this is eternal. If you watched my devotions this week, you heard me mention about the creation of Adam in Genesis. I spoke about how in this creation there is this man, this “**living creature**,” as it’s translated; *nephesh* in the Hebrew, or *psyche* in the Greek Septuagint. Why do I give you the words? Well, I mentioned the Greek because *psyche* is where we get the word in English, psyche and psychological. It’s also the word that’s often translated soul. So it’s easy to hear this and think this is just about the soul, about the immaterial eternal. And as I’ve been talking about this, as I said, I’ve been talking about the eternal. But that translation is great. This Adam is not just created to be an immaterial soul as we would call it. He is a living creature; a whole being body and soul. God created Adam body and soul. And in the Garden you see care for body and soul. You see the trees which sustain the body and the Tree of Life by which Adam communes with God and you see care of the soul.

As you journey in this wilderness of this broken and fallen world, He does the same for you. Just as Jesus fed those four thousand in the wilderness, He feeds you. He feeds your soul with His Word, with His forgiveness, with His body and blood in His Supper. He feeds you and sustains you with that life giving word that as you trek on day by day, hour by hour, you might be prevented from growing faint. This is why I say that about reading the Word. You’ll look around at the circumstances that will exhaust you in the worries they bring. And the Devil will try to burden you all the more with them, but the Word tells you that the sin that creates all this stress has been forgiven. It tells

you that the devil who brings all this tyranny into the world, who entices man into it that man would be kept in tyranny by his own will, that devil has been defeated. He has been overcome. He's lost. The cross has set the trap for him and the resurrection shows forth the victory. That victory, again, given to you in the Word and Sacrament to sustain you.

And yet I said you can see this care in soul and in body. In eternal and temporal. While the Word and Sacrament bring eternal care to temporary contexts—that is, they bring the eternal victory to help sustain us in this temporal life—our God still cares for our temporal needs too.

That's something that is so comforting in this passage. You know, it's easy to analogize this from the long journey home that these people had to take to the long journey we endure until we reach the Promised Land of God's eternal kingdom, and that's not wrong for us to see. However, there's still this really comforting reality: Jesus actually gave them temporal bread for their temporal needs. Why is that so comforting? Well, in reality it's never as comforting as the eternal promises in Jesus. But it is comforting because as we are stretched thin by things, by the goings on around us, we can fear for the needs of the body.

Think about it, how short of a time ago we were worried about the temporal needs of toilet paper and of meat shortages. Now that's calmed, and there's all this unrest, which if taken to the final end of those leading some of the charges could result in revolution. There would be real risk to bodily care. But Christians, Jesus fed the four thousand. Jesus had compassion on the four thousand. Jesus looked at them and He ached in His guts for them.

And so also He aches in His guts for you. He sees you and how thinly you get stretched. He knows that exhaustion and more. He knows the needs you have of food and shelter. And he knows how to ensure you get them.

As a close, I remember hearing a story when I was in college of some missionaries who had hit the point where their bank accounts were drained, they weren't sure when they would have money to buy food again, and they weren't sure how they were going to get by. But one evening having come home from their work they found their counter filled with groceries. The person telling me the story said the missionaries claimed that no other person knew of their need. But the Lord did, and He provided for them. Whether He did this miraculously or by natural means doesn't matter. The reality is true. He cared for them. And He will care for you. Just as He has created you, created you, body and soul, so He will care for you, care for you, body and soul. Amen.