

The Seventh Sunday after Trinity

St. Mark 8:1-9: "We Receive the Gifts of the Lord with Thanksgiving."

August 3/4, 2019 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Almighty God, our heavenly Father, whose mercies are new unto us every morning and who, though we have in no way deserved Your goodness, abundantly provide for all our wants of body and soul, give us, we pray, Your Holy Spirit, that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness toward us, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 147)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the eighth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, [Jesus] called His disciples to Him and said to them, "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." / And His disciples answered Him, "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?" / And He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" / They said, "Seven." / And He directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, He broke them and gave them to His disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd. And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, He said that these also should be set before them. And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. And there were about four thousand people. And He sent them away. ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who gives more than we ask for or could even imagine, dear fellow redeemed:

Two farmers planted their crops and closely watched the progress of their growth. One of them worried every step of the way. First he worried that the ground would dry out, so the seed could be planted. Then he worried that the plants would get the right amount of rain and sunshine. Rarely were the conditions on any given day perfect. If it was sunny and hot, he worried about the plants having enough moisture. If it was sunny and cool, he worried about slow growth. If it began to rain, he worried about too much or too little falling. He often thought about his bad fortune when things weren't looking so good. There was not much joy in his work.

The other farmer considered all these factors, but he realized that hardly any of them were in his control. He had been at it long enough to know that the crop almost always turned out—some years a little better and some years a little worse. He didn't get too excited by the highs or

too depressed by the lows. Farming hadn't made him rich, but it was a good way of life. He enjoyed his work.

The difference between these two men could be chalked up to personality—one was more easy-going, the other a worrier. But the difference could also be that one relied on the Lord to provide for his needs, while the other relied on himself. If your livelihood and success depended entirely on you, of course you would be full of worry and stress! But if you know that the living God cares for you, His dear child, you will confidently look for blessings from His hand.

We see a wonderful example of the Lord's care in today's Gospel lesson. A great crowd had been with Him for three days and had even followed Him into the wilderness. Any food they had brought with them was all but gone. But the text does not say that the people approached Jesus about their hunger.

They did not have to ask Jesus to feed them, because He already knew. His care for them came from His own heart of love. *"I have compassion on the crowd,"* He said. *"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."* Not only was he aware of their hunger. He was aware that some had further to travel than others. He *knew* these people, and He cared for them deeply.

He wanted His disciples to have the same care for the people. He wanted them to love these neighbors of theirs and to participate in their help. But all they could produce was seven loaves of bread. How could such a small amount feed four thousand men? Reasonably speaking, it couldn't. There probably wouldn't even be one crumb available for each person who was present.

But God, as the Bible says, *"is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think"* (Eph. 3:20). We so often forget that. We assume that most everything in our lives depends on ourselves. This causes us to despair when things go bad or to be full of pride when things go well. We forget that it is the Lord who provides.

If we do well at our work, we should remember that God has given us the strength, the mental capacity, and the character traits to do a good job. This is what we recite in the First Article of the Creed: *"I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them"* (Small Catechism). If God did not give and preserve these qualities, we could not do anything. Our success comes entirely from Him.

But we don't always succeed in our work. Does that mean the Lord has failed to provide for us, or that He has given up on us? We know this is not the case. He cares for us. Because He cares for us, He knows exactly what we need. He knows when to bless by giving and when to bless by withholding.

Sometimes He withholds because it would not be good for us to succeed. We don't see the trouble ahead, but He does. He may also withhold to teach us patience and endurance, or to get

us to step up and work harder. Whether we receive little or plenty, we should be thankful for the portion we have and use it to the glory of God.

Jesus here also teaches us how to respond to the gifts of God. What did He do before breaking apart the seven loaves and giving them to His disciples to distribute? He gave thanks. He gave thanks for seven loaves of bread and a few small fish as He looked upon a crowd of thousands. Proportionally that would be something like giving thanks to God for one grain of rice on an otherwise empty plate. No matter the amount of the gift, we learn from Jesus to be thankful and to give thanks. Seven loaves of bread were better than none; they were something. And the Lord knew how to turn them into much, much more.

What are some of the things in your life that are easy to take for granted but are great gifts from God? Your family, for one, and your house and health and job. Any of us here can open our cupboards and see how God provides food. We can open our closets and see how God provides clothing. We can open our contact list or directory and see how God provides friends.

God typically does not give the bare minimum – He blesses us in abundance. The crowd of four thousand men ate their fill of bread and fish, and there were still seven baskets left over! In the same way, our homes are filled with good things, enough to keep us happy and satisfied for a long time.

What is our response to these gifts? Imagine if the crowd of four thousand was enjoying its miraculous lunch, and one after another started to complain and ask for more. “Could we get a little butter for this bread?” “How about some salt?” “Is there anything for dessert?” By these demands for more, the people would seem discontent and ungrateful.

How is it for you? Are you content with the gifts the Lord has given you? If you are, how do you show it? Do you remember to thank Him for what you have? One of the best times to thank the Lord is when you take time out of your day to eat. Here the Lord is providing you with the nourishment you need to continue your work. Without food and drink you could not survive.

So you ask Him to bless the food before you that it may benefit your body and strengthen you. Some of you use the “Thank You Prayer.” It is a great prayer that comes directly from Scripture. Notice that this prayer is not simply saying thanks for the food. It is thanking the Lord for His goodness and His ongoing mercy that accompanies us into eternity: “O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endures forever.”

The Lord is good to us in so many ways, we cannot keep track of all of them. His earthly gifts aren't even the best part of His care! The best part of our Father's care is what He accomplished for us through His Son. Jesus' greatest work was not turning seven loaves of bread into food for thousands. His greatest work was giving Himself up as the sacrificial Lamb on the cross and rising again from the dead in glory.

This unmatched gift of Jesus means that our sins are no longer counted against us. Whenever we have worried that everything depended on our efforts, or despaired because our hard work did not pay off, or become prideful because of our success, or failed to give thanks to God in daily prayer, He declares us forgiven of these sins through the blood of Christ. Today is a new

day, a fresh opportunity, to set aside those worries, put our trust totally in Him, and thank Him for His blessings both great and small.

God is not a vengeful overlord who will punish us for our failures. Nor does He award His gifts based on our merit. Nobody deserves the good things He gives. But He still has compassion on the crowd. He still provides for the needs of all people – and especially His dear children – on account of His loving care. If you are in need, He wants you to pray for His help. If He has given you plenty, He wants you to share with those who have little. If you have what you need but not all you want, He encourages you to pray for contentment.

The Lord loves you with a tremendous love, and He promises to provide for your needs. Jesus said, “[S]eek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things – what you need for this body and life – will be added to you” (Mat. 6:33). When His Word is your priority, you will find like the crowd did that all your earthly needs will be taken care of.

Then you can go about your work with joy and thankfulness. Joy in knowing that our compassionate Lord is eager to give such gifts, and thankfulness for His abundant blessings.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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