

The Seventh Sunday after Trinity  
St. Mark 8:1-9: "Jesus Knows Our Need."  
July 17/18, 2021 | 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.)*

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*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. <sup>(ESV)</sup>

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

In Christ Jesus, who gently guides us, knows our need, and well provides us (ELH #177, v. 1), dear fellow redeemed:

"I shouldn't have to ask! You should just know what I need!" Have you ever said this to someone? Has anyone ever said it to you? Most married couples have experience with this. One person is shocked that the other could be so clueless. The other is surprised that he is expected to be able to read minds. The only way out of a dilemma like this is not sarcasm, not shouting, not tears. Believe it or not, the only way out is actual communication!

A healthy relationship requires communication. Communication is a two-way street. One person speaks, and the other person listens. One expresses a need, and the other responds. Prayer is the way we communicate with God. We express our needs and troubles to Him, and He hears us. He promises that when we ask, He will give; when we seek, we will find; and when we knock, He will open (Mat. 7:7).

But why should we have to pray? Doesn't God know what we need without our asking Him? He certainly does, but that does not mean prayer is a waste of time. If prayer is a waste of time, then Jesus wasted a lot of time, because Jesus often prayed. His disciples noticed this about Him. On one occasion when Jesus had finished a time of prayer, one of the disciples said, "*Lord, teach us to pray*" (Luk. 11:1). Then Jesus gave them a basic framework for prayer, which we call the "Lord's Prayer."

In this prayer, Jesus taught us to pray for our earthly needs with the words, "*Give us this day our daily bread.*" In this petition, we acknowledge that our heavenly Father has the power to give us what we need. We also acknowledge that we don't have this power. But is that really the case? It seems as though we are able to obtain on our own what we need for this life.

If I need a home, I can build one using materials found in the natural world. If I need clothing, there are various ways to produce it. If I need food, I can grow it, hunt for it, or buy it. Why do I need to ask God for the things that I can get myself? By teaching us this petition, Jesus wants us to recognize that although we have a part to play in harvesting and shaping goods for ourselves, they are ultimately gifts from God.

Where would we be if God stopped sending rain? Where would we be if He covered up the light of the sun? Where would we be if He took away all the trees? It is clear that the part we play in getting our daily bread is very small compared to what God does. We see this illustrated in today's text. Nobody prompted Jesus to feed the crowd. As far as we know, no one begged Him for food. Jesus knew their need. "*I have compassion on the crowd,*" He said, "*because they have been with Me now three days and have nothing to eat.*"

He knew they would not have the strength to get home if He sent them away. So He put the concern to His disciples. Even though they had previously witnessed His feeding of five thousand men from five loaves of bread and two fish, they did not bring that up here. Why didn't they? How could that not be on their minds? It's probably because they never knew when Jesus would perform a miracle.

I'm sure there were times they went without, days when they wished they had more food. And Jesus did not just snap His fingers and make bread appear. Maybe they, too, were hungry and tired along with the crowd. Maybe they were irritated and uncomfortable in the heat, and Jesus was asking them to do something they could not do.

But it was something He could do. When Jesus learned they had seven loaves of bread and a few fish, He had the crowd recline on the ground. Then He gave thanks, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples to distribute. Then He blessed the fish and had these distributed. The entire crowd of four thousand men, along with women and children (Mat. 15:38), had their fill of this food—so much so that seven large baskets of fragments were collected after the meal.

Now wouldn't it be silly if the people who brought the seven loaves of bread and the fish took credit for everyone being fed? And wouldn't it be offensive if the disciples went around bragging about how many people they had served? Isn't it just as silly and offensive when we act like all our success on earth is due to our own hard work, our own intelligence, and so on?

Sometimes we chalk up our success to “good fortune.” But the credit and glory should really go to our gracious God.

This is what we do when we pray, “*Give us this day our daily bread.*” We honor the Almighty God, the Maker and Preserver of all good things. God does not need to be reminded to give us the things we need. But we need to be reminded that He is the Giver, and there is no good apart from Him. And we need to remember to thank Him for His gifts. His gifts are not dependent on our thanks, or else we would probably have nothing. But only the arrogant or the rude refuse to give thanks when great gifts are given.

Our God knows exactly what we need – not just us as a people, but us as individuals. He knows what you need. He knows when you are in need of help and comfort and encouragement. And He also knows when you are in need of chastisement and training. He does not automatically give you everything you ask for. What you ask for might not be good for you, even if you think it is. What you need might actually be the opposite of what you ask for, or it might be something you haven’t even considered.

Jesus knew that His disciples needed to be presented with a problem they could not solve. He knew that their faith in Him was weak and needed strengthening. Even though they had witnessed Him perform miracle after miracle, they did not fully understand who He was and why He came. They were focused on earthly kingdoms and earthly glory. Jesus was focused on giving Himself as the atoning sacrifice for sinners. The disciples thought the main thing they lacked was bread. Jesus knew the main thing they lacked was faith.

So Jesus tested them, and then He showed them again that when He is present there is no need to worry. We need to be tested and taught like this as well. The Lord tests us through pain and trial and loss to teach us not to rely on ourselves but to trust in Him. We cannot get by on our own. We need to be shown our severe limitations. We need to know our weaknesses. We need to recognize how thoroughly sin has worked its way through us, and how deserving we are of death.

And we also need to know that the Lord still looks upon us with compassion. We need to know that “*with the LORD there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption*” (Psa. 130:7, NKJV). We need to know that He did not turn His back on us because of our sin, but that He gave Himself to pay for our sin.

The world’s most pressing want or desire is not the forgiveness Jesus won. Ask many people, and they will say our most pressing need is food for the starving, or peace for the nations at war, or justice for the hurting. But the world’s most pressing need is not these temporary things. As Moses reminded the people of Israel, “*man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD*” (Deu. 8:3). What the world needs most, what each one of us needs most, is God’s Word of grace and forgiveness.

And Jesus knows this. That’s why He instituted the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, by which we are cleansed of our sins. That’s why He appoints pastors to serve His people and speak His absolution for their sins. That’s why He established the Sacrament of the Altar, so that the faithful might kneel before Him and receive His body and blood for the remission of their sins.

Our celebration of the Lord's Supper bears a striking resemblance to the feeding of the four thousand. At the feeding of the four thousand, Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to the people gathered around Him. At the institution of His Supper, Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to His disciples (Mat. 26:27). And just as He blessed the fish before it was distributed, we also bless the wine with His own words (1Co. 10:16). Then we distribute His body with the bread and His blood with the wine.

The great crowd was completely satisfied with the bread and fish Jesus gave them. And we are completely satisfied when we come to the Lord's Table. We trust that when we eat His body and drink His blood, we receive exactly what He promises – the full and free forgiveness of all our sins. There was no limit to the amount of people Jesus could have fed in the wilderness. And there is no limit to the amount of sinners Jesus wants to feed and cleanse with His own body and blood.

**Jesus Knows Our Need.** This is why we pray for His blessings. He knows what we need better than we do. In His compassion, He freely and abundantly provides for the needs of our body and soul. He teaches us to ask for these gifts with confidence and to believe that He will always give us what is best for us. We give thanks that He makes the impossible possible for the people He so dearly loves.

*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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