

## Trinity 7 - 08/04/2019

Text: Mark 8:1-9

Note: This Sunday also marks the celebration of 40 years since the first worship service in Sherman: August 5, 1979.

### **"How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?"**

Let's set the context for our Gospel reading. Jesus has been teaching and working miracles. He's *already* miraculously fed 5,000 men – not to mention women or children – in the wilderness. So Mark introduces this story with the phrase, **"when again a great crowd had gathered."** In this desolate place, another great crowd has been gathered to hear the teaching of Jesus, perhaps to witness a miracle. They've all been there three days, and they have nothing to eat.

Jesus has **"compassion"** on the crowds; this word is σπλαγχνίζομαι, it's a word that means to have pity or sympathize or have compassion, but not in merely a cerebral or an emotional way. The word comes from *splachna*, which is like your guts, your insides; so from your very guts, with your whole body and being, you're having sympathy on or pity for whomever. And in this case it's Jesus, with His whole being having pity on, sympathy for, having compassion on these helpless, starving people, out here in the wilderness, whom if he sends them away will faint; and some are from very far away, they won't make it home.

This prompts the question from the disciples: **"How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?"** And Jesus answers them by showing them just what He can do, just what the Lord is capable of, just what the Lord gives from His compassionate, loving self.

What appears impossible to man's eyes and reason, to the Lord is a simple matter. Our Lord is a giver of gifts, a provider of provision, and here Jesus lovingly does just this: He gives daily bread. Our Lord Jesus Christ took the bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, sending them out amongst the crowd to tell them to take and eat. **"And they ate and were satisfied."** The Lord provided so well that there was plenty left over, seven baskets full. And having taught them, having cared for them, having fed them, *then* Jesus sends them away from this place where they had congregated.

Isn't it tremendous how our Lord Jesus helps? In His compassion, He sent none away hungry to their hurt or doom, but instead kept them and cared for them. His compassion even extends

beyond the act of feeding them to the act of caring for their every need even though they, seeming to be foolish, came thoroughly unprepared.

In this story of the help and compassion of Jesus there is certainly comfort, but I find here also an admonition: a call to get our priorities straight. These people were reckless in following Jesus out into the wilderness with no food, weren't they? And that is a lesson for us: by nature we put food and clothing and temporal things first, and *if* we look to the Words and promises of God at all, we look to them afterwards, *if* there is any time and energy left for it. But our Lord here shows us the reverse. He is saying to us, "Pay attention to my Word first, seek first the kingdom of God, be first of all my disciples. I am resolved not to let you starve, so I will provide all that you need to support this body and life. Listen to my Word, follow me, and all else will be added to you.

Now let's set the context for our Gospel reading today.

Sherman, IL 40 years ago was a desolate place. Not in the sense of wilderness, with nothing around, and that you'd be in danger of starving to death if you ended up here. But it was desolate because the pure preaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to His institution, was not here. There was a real need here, people were dying, or at least at risk of dying, of spiritual starvation, and the question was rightly asked **"How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?"**

Now we know from our Lord's Word that no man can feed another without the Lord. This is true of daily bread, for it is God who causes the rain to fall, the seed to sprout up, for mankind to work to bring in the harvest and to bake the bread. But it's also especially true of the bread which comes down from heaven. It is only through the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, working through us, striking and enlivening hearts through His Word; only through Christ's work by which we are fed with the eternal food, the true bread of life.

Our Lord used Pastor Eisenbraun, the OAFB workers who came through here in 1979, and a bunch of His people in the area to plant this congregation, here in this desolate place. And what did our Lord Jesus immediately do? He had compassion. He came and fed those people, and others heard the Word and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and were fed and welcomed into the family of God here. It wasn't 4,000, but the feeding was just as miraculous: because with just plain people speaking to one another, with just plain water and plain bread and wine, yet all with the Word of God richly combined with them, our Good Shepherd Jesus established a flock here, even to this day.

It's interesting to note that the feeding of the 4,000 takes place in Gentile territory; truly in the wilderness, in a desolate place. And not just physically, but spiritually. Some of the ancient church

fathers noted that the number 4,000 – 4 x 1,000 – indicates the completeness of the 4 corners of the earth. Namely, that the mission of Christ's Church is to every one in every land; or as Jesus puts it in Matthew 28, to **"all nations."** Even here, in Sherman, IL, our Lord has seen fit to bring His Gospel to save many.

20 years ago, when celebrating the 20-year anniversary of the planting of Good Shepherd, Pastor Robert Kuhn, then the First Vice-President of the Synod, preached and during that sermon talked about "the next 20 years." And of course we've just lived through those years and I'm sure they are in many ways completely unexpected; and yet, at the same time, they are just as our Lord willed them to be and some things were just as expected and as hoped for: the Gospel remains here, God's people are fed on the Body and Blood of Christ, new believers are made in Holy Baptism, faithful Christians are laid to rest from their labors. This is Christ's Church: this is what He would have had us do.

So what about the next 20 years? What about the next 20 years here in this desolate place? It was recounted to me that one comment made 40 years ago was that it was going to take an awful lot of work. It does. It is hard work that the Lord has given us to do here. I pray that I am up for it, by His grace. I pray that you are too. We don't and can't know what exactly the next 20 years will look like or bring.

But here's what we do know. Here's what is certain, and this is what we rest on, take comfort in, and even rejoice in. **"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."** His Word always accomplishes that for which He purposes it. He does not desire the death of a sinner, but that the sinner would repent and live. He washes away our sins in Holy Baptism. He feeds us with His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sins in the Sacrament of the Altar. He will never leave us nor forsake us. He is making all things new.

**When the poor and needy seek water,**

**and there is none,**

**and their tongue is parched with thirst,**

**I the Lord will answer them;**

**I the God of Israel will not forsake them.**

**I will open rivers on the bare heights,  
and fountains in the midst of the valleys.**

**I will make the wilderness a pool of water,  
and the dry land springs of water.**

**I will put in the wilderness the cedar,  
the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive.**

**I will set in the desert the cypress,  
the plane and the pine together,  
that they may see and know,  
may consider and understand together,  
that the hand of the Lord has done this,  
the Holy One of Israel has created it.**

(Isaiah 41:17–20, ESV)

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