**Compassion To Feed**

 **Mark 8:1-9**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

"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."

This is the compassion of our Lord. He cares for these people who have come from afar to hear Him. Jesus helps us to understand these words when He gives us the prayer which bears His name, specifically the petition, *give us this day our daily bread.*

You have prayed that petition in that prayer often enough – every Sunday for years – you pray this prayer at home during the week, probably daily, and hopefully numerous times in the week. In praying this prayer, have you truly seriously pondered each of the petitions in that prayer? Specifically, in regard to today's sermon, have you meditated upon the petition, *give us this day our daily bread*?

Luther explains this petition: *God gives daily bread indeed without our prayer, also to all the wicked; but we pray in this petition that He would lead us to know it, and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.*

Yes, this petition asks God to satisfy our daily needs, but more than that, it is a petition asking God to work in us the faith to believe that all that we have life in this mortal flesh, comes to us by His Divine mercy. In fact, He provides the NEEDS of all people. We are also to remember this aspect of God’s Divine gracious mercy and receive our daily bread with ***daily*** thanksgiving. This is something we need to do.

How often do you eat without thinking about where the food came from? Yes, we know where it was purchased, we know who cooked it, but do we also remember that it was a gift from God?

Yes, I know, like me, you always begin your meal with a prayer of thanks to God. But it is also true, that just like me, too often that mealtime prayer rolls off our lips with nary a thought about what it means. And way too often, there is little to no consideration of the awesome truth expressed about God’s blessings to place that food before us.

In the same way, we often take our families and loved ones for granted. And today, as I sit here preaching this morning in the middle of Matins, quarantined at home, we take for granted our health and the security of this life.

Way too often, we believe that all the things which make up our daily bread, are things that are owed to us. It is a reflection of the entitlement mentality of those who believe that since they have a job, they are owed a paycheck - whether they work hard for it or not. How often do we believe that we deserve to have all the good things – happiness, good health, nice home, and whatever else you’d like to add to the list – and that all these are due to us.

But, where do these things come from? They come from the mighty hand of Him who created and still creates all that exists.

Yes, all that we have is a gift from God, but not because of anything that we have done – and certainly, not because as **SINNERS** we deserve it. All worldly gifts – as well as all spiritual gifts – are **all** given to us from the merciful hand of our gracious God because of His great love for His children – His compassion – not because of anything we have done.

Every day, we sit down to eat, food is there, we expect it. The disciples had come to the same conclusion. But Jesus gives them a wake-up call one day. They had been gone for three days and they were now in this desolate place when He 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."

They ask, "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?"

There is no Econo Foods, no Charlie’s, no Walmart supercenter, not even a Kwik Trip. We can only imagine the disciples looking around – their sinfulness rampant in how they are thinking, reflecting the same sinfulness we share with them. They forget God, they forget the One who created and sustains all of creation, they fall into the sinful doubting. Sinfulness closes their eyes so that all they can see it what appears to be the only reality – the physical world which surrounds them.

Jesus ignores their doubts, He simply asks them, "How many loaves do you have?” He knows what He can – and what He will do. There is plenty here for the one by whom all things were made, and without whom was not anything made that was made. (John 1:3)

Imagine the twelve hearing Jesus’ question. They all looked at the crowd of people, a couple are now digging their sandaled toes into the ground, they are looking through their stash of meager supplies. It has been three days, and there is not much left of what they had carried with them – their combined stock isn’t much. They reply, "Seven.”

Their minds are awhirl. What good will seven loaves of bread be for so many? Pastor has COVID, he might die. What is going on in our world with this disease, it is running rampant? Seems like madness is breaking out all over.

Jesus calmly 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.

All four thousand ate their fill - from seven loaves and few small fish - satisfying their hunger.

Yes, this is a great miracle. We could talk about this great miracle and get lost in it and what it means for us in this world, but it was nothing for Jesus – the Word of God which brought into existence that is, to do such a thing.

Yes, we easily get caught up in the feeding of the four thousand with bread and fish. We do so because our sinfulness gets caught up in our preoccupation with the physical reality of our world and the only, or at the best, most important thing.

But there is something greater at work here. Did you hear what had taken place? Jesus **took** the seven loaves, **gave thanks**, **broke** them and **gave** them to his disciples to set before the people.

This is a mundane meal, it is simply bread and fish. It is Friday night fish fry in Wisconsin. It is a meal that satisfies the needs of the flesh. In this particular instance, it was necessary to give nourishment so that the crowd could be sent on their way back home, and that they would not faint from weakness on the way.

It is a miracle! It is an astoundingly great miracle. But it points to a greater miracle.

On the night in which He was to be betrayed, He’d do the same thing. On that night, **He took** the bread, **gave thanks**, **broke it**, and **gave** it to His disciples saying, “Take eat; this is my body, which is given for you.”

Can you imagine their astonishment at these words? Did they look around at one another wondering, “did He just say that the bread He is giving us is His body? But He’s sitting right here, how can that be? He must have meant that it represents His body! Or that it will change into His body when we eat it.”

Of course, Jesus did not stop with just that one astonishing statement as He broke that particular loaf of His bread and gave His bread to them. Nope, He does something else. In the same way, He took the cup after supper; and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them saying; “Take drink; this cup is the new testament in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this often in remembrance of me.”

Again, they were perplexed, what thoughts ran through their minds, as His cup is going from person to person, “No thank you Lord, I have my own cup of wine, thanks, I think I’ll pass – I just think I’d drink the wine in my own cup.” “He’s giving us His blood? It sure looks like wine! It sure tastes like wine! Maybe He’s just confused, He’s had a bit to drink at this Passover meal. He means it represents His blood – not that it really is – right?”

If what they may have imagined were true, then when Matthew, Mark, and Luke recorded the events of that night didn’t they declare that truth and help cut through the confusion we have today? There would be no Lord’s Supper confusion if they had only done that!

The thing is, there is no confusion. There is no confusion because of the miracle in our text, and the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. When the Holy Spirit opened their minds to understand things, He brough them to remember it all together. On the night when He was betrayed, as He instituted His Supper, the disciples were thinking, “Hey, that is exactly what He did and said when He fed the four thousand – that is exactly what He did when He fed the five thousand. If He could perform that miracle, then this must indeed be His body and this must indeed be His very blood. What is going on?”

After that meal, He was taken from their midst. He was tried before the High Priest, and then brought before Pilate. Pilate then commanded that Jesus be crucified, and His body was pierced by cruel nails. His life would rush from His flesh, suffering the pains of hell, abandoned by His Father, paying for the lack of faith in the disciples, in you, and in me.

After He rose from the dead, He walked with some of His disciples on the road to Emmaus. They did not recognize Him until they stopped and prepared to eat, then Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized the Lord.

This is why this is the most important weekly occurrence in the early church. Throughout the book of Acts we are reminded that those who believed in Jesus as the fulfillment of Moses and the Prophets gathered together every first day of the week – the day of Christ’s Resurrection – for the “breaking of the bread.” They gathered weekly to receive Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.

We sometimes get so worried about the things of this life, that our sinfulness leads us to forget that the Author of life is still in control. We get so caught up in what our eyes see that sinfulness overwhelms, and we stumble, we forget to walk by faith.

I cannot speak for you, but I need a weekly refresher of my faith. I need to regularly receive forgiveness so that I get a “reboot” of the operating system installed, baptism point one.

As we gather at the Lord’s Table, the Word of Christ is repeated over simple bread and wine, and as in our text, a great miracle takes place. This is truly astounding! As He fed four thousand, He gives to us His body and His blood – just as He declares in the words of institution.

It is His great compassion to feed us heavenly food to strengthen our faith for our journey in this life, His body and blood are indeed present. In His great compassion to feed us forgiveness of sins. It is His compassion to feed us for this life, and for eternity. And in He compassion He sends us out into our desolate world, and we are blessed on our way, satisfied now and forevermore. Amen.