

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

There are many things that we can learn from the feeding of the 4 thousand, but the most significant thing is that the Lord has compassion upon the hungry crowd that has come out to hear him and he acted upon it. The Lord has also had compassion upon us, he has not sent his son to die in vain, nor has he sent him merely for his future, but yet still distant spiritual good. But he has sent us to redeem us, to make us his children now. He who was crucified is risen from the dead for us, he has raised himself up from the dead in order to abide with us, to keep on feeding us. And he who is risen from the dead is concerned with all of us, both body and soul, with spiritual and family life, with our churches and our cities and the like. He has compassion upon us and he acts on it. He delivers it to us in real-time in the word and in the sacraments.

But often he makes us hungry first. Faith learns to see that the Lord acts at all times in compassion and mercy and all things work together for the good of those who are in Christ Jesus. If we look closely at the feeding of the 4 thousand, we notice it looks a lot like our divine service. The people have come explicitly to hear Jesus to listen to his word to be in his presence. They have been so caught up in this that they have forgotten their own physical needs. Imagine a sailor in the 19th century embarking on a 10-day transatlantic journey, whose enthusiasm for the trip has caused him to fail to plan. And after 5 days out at sea, he realizes he is out of water. There is nowhere to get fresh water and he is doomed. The crowd is like that sailor. The lord is not exaggerating, if he sends them away without feeding some will die. They do not have the strength to walk back to the Green places. And so also the Apostles are correct in their response. There is no way to feed that many people in that desolate place. And even if it wasn't completely desolate, if there was a bakery or a field of grain, or even a modern Walmart. Even if you went to Walmart right after church and tried on the spot to buy 1 thousand loaves of bread you wouldn't be able.

The point here is that it is a ridiculous amount of people and food required, and there is no way to do it. The Lord has done this to them on purpose. It is an act of compassion; he has drawn them out, and caused them to forget themselves precisely so he can expose their need. They have come

to hear him and that is good, man lives not by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. They have no bread so they must live by what they came for; by his word. They live but they are dying, they cannot help themselves, but he is their help and their food.

In this, the crowd is the perfect congregation, the perfect Christians. They are not chastised for their foolishness, for forgetting to care for their physical needs or to plan. But instead, the Lord responds in compassion. They have come for his word and he loves them in their need, he doesn't therefore organize them into committees and work parties. Assigning the care of the weak and elderly to the young and the strong. Raising up leaders and giving them tasks. Nor does he create a breadline or buffet. He has them all sit down, though the place is barren and desolate, and though they are poor and weak they prepare to partake of a banquet; as though they have come to a restaurant. And the Holy Apostles will wait upon them.

The Lord then takes bread, gives thanks and breaks it and gives it to them. They eat in luxury as much as they want and are satisfied. They receive from Christ's bounty without merit or worthiness in perfect passivity and trust.

Not because they were smart enough or worked hard enough, or were clever enough but because they had need and the lord had compassion.

It is most likely that they were not fully aware of the danger they were in, and at the same time they were unable to fully appreciate the gift that was given. And so is the life of faith on this side of glory. We are gladly the lapdogs that eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table, even if we do not fully understand what is going on.

While no man can feed 4 thousand men in the desert, the Lord god can and does and does so as a man. So also, what is less obvious is that no one can feed one man even himself in the city or in the fertile land without the Lord. And so it is that our mothers rightly taught us to pray before eating, even though it is never commanded anywhere in the bible, not even in the levitical law, there is no command to pray before meals, but nevertheless it would be dangerous and arrogant to neglect this important ceremony. The Lord does do this by example, he gives thanks before he feeds the crowds

here, the 5 thousand men earlier and the Holy Apostles on the night he was betrayed as he feeds them with his immortal flesh hidden in mortality and bread.

It is absolutely necessary one way or the other for us to confess and give thanks that God gives what we need and provides for this body and life. Without him, we would have nothing and be destroyed. Even as it is necessary for us to confess that if he had not redeemed us by his sacrifice on the cross it would not matter if we had food or not. So we rightly pause in a good and salutary way, pause before we eat and recognize that the food we eat comes from God. That he gives it and we thank him for it.

Now there are those who question, or outright deny all of our Lord's miracles, even this one. And some people who do not think Jesus was a miracle worker, they think that the point of this miracle was sharing. They do not believe that he actually multiplied the bread and fish, but rather he simply inspired people to stop being so selfish. When the boy pulls out bread and fish they are inspired by his example and everyone who was holding back now digs deep and there is plenty for anyone and the only reason anyone is hungry in this world is because men are selfish.

In the first place, of course, this simply denies the plain words of holy Scripture, which demonstrate that the Lord is not seeking to teach them to behave better and be better people, but he actually wanted to serve their needs, and if he didn't his compassion isn't very deep. But this is a pernicious error for another reason as well. Because it turns the Holy Gospel upside down. It makes the Lord's primary purpose not to redeem us or to forgive us, but simply to guide us into a higher morality. As if we are almost there and all we need is a little push and we can be the people God wants us to be. It's not that the idea of sharing is bad, but simply that the Lord's compassion is greater than that. The Lord does not help those who can help themselves, but rather the helpless. These 4 thousand people have no hope, no place to go, there is no way to feed them even if everyone shares in this desolate place. And these are the sort of people the Lord helps. That's why he has them sit down and be waited on.

But so also the purpose of the miracles needs to be better defined and understood, for many pious Christians have thought the purpose of the miracles are simply to show that Christ is true God. And to be sure the miracles demonstrate this precise thing. But in the feeding of the 4 thousand, the Lord isn't trying to prove anything. His purpose isn't to try and get the crowd to worship him or to be nicer to one another and to share, those things do happen though, they do in fact worship him and good works follow b/c good works follow faith. It's not that those things are wrong or bad, but they are not his purpose. He is rather simply having compassion on them because they have a need. The miracle shows his divinity in a sense b/c through his word the spirit causes them to recognize who he is. But they do more than that, they show us his character, that his mercy endures forever. That he actually cares about real things, about things we need, that he has come in peace to restore creation and us to His Father, and that he has overcome death and the devil for us.

That is to say that the miracles do not show simply that he is god but what kind of God he is. The kind who will lay down his life to make us his, the kind who has compassion upon the hungry, the lame, and the downtrodden. The Lord is compassionate and kind, he looks upon us with his mercy, our crosses, and hardships, our pain and our sorrows are not signs of his wrath or disfavor. They are his loving chastisement. Let the injustices you suffer cause you to long for the goodness and mercy and justice of God. Let this world's pain and disappointment send you running to the God who is constant in his love and keeps his promises. And let this world's many judgments, both false and true, along with the law's true and accurate accusations make you eager; desperate even for the good news of God's forgiveness of Christ and the promise on the last day.

May our daily hunger and need for food and water make us hungry for what God our Lord gives, righteousness, and what he has promised, life with him so that we never become satisfied and want to stay in our cities and families but always be ready and willing to follow him in his death even if it is to our death. May we ever be dissatisfied with this life and recognize we are in fact living in a desolate place that has nothing to offer us. May we find constant solace and comfort in the green place the Lord has provided in the Divine service, where he is present for us, where he causes us to

sit down and be waited upon. Here he speaks the life-giving words of the gospel, his compassion for us. Let us find nourishment and satisfaction in the midst of pain and injustice where the Lord takes bread, gives thanks and breaks it and gives it to us, his own risen body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. For he alone can feed us in this desolate place. His mercy endures forever.

In Jesus' name.