

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

It is a strange picture indeed, a crowd numbering 5000 men wandering out in the wilderness. Seemingly lost, with no food or drink, no shelter or protection. Just a crowd following a man because this man is Christ; because this man can cure disease and fix any ailment.

But here in the crowd we see a picture of mankind, and of ourselves. As we live our lives here on this earth we are wandering through the wilderness. Cut off from God, our sin draining us of any life, slowly and surely killing us. There is only one end for us and that is death, try as we might to stop it death comes for us all, it cannot be stopped. We are not cut out to survive here alone. Death is prowling around, just around every corner. We are so weary and faint because of the weight of our sin that we will not survive.

In the wilderness of the world, we need refreshment. Our Lord's sympathy anticipates our wants. His heart goes out to the crowd thrusting and hungering for Him. Who seek him first above all things. He does not wait for them to ask but instead gives them what they need. It is not the disciples or the crowd but Christ who is the first to offer relief. He suggests to Philip that they should care for the large crowd that followed him. His heart went out to them, he had compassion on them before the need had been felt – "seeing that a multitude was coming to Him." He has tender sympathy with mankind, with those who are struggling, hungering, and thirsting.

Indeed because He can individualize each one. He was never too weary for acts and thoughts of love. But our Lord would have us feel our poverty and inability in order that we may be driven to turn to Him for relief. He allows and insists that these men would hunger and thirst. He could have stayed near the towns, he could have filled their bellies as they walked so they never felt the pains of an empty stomach.

All too often we recoil from any suffering. We claim it cannot be God's will, that it is evil and bad. But suffering is good for us when it draws us to Christ. The problem is not simply that we suffer, but that when we suffer we do not turn towards Christ. Not truly, we turn towards God as a bread king, someone who can remove our earthly suffering. We like the crowd want to take Christ and force him to be our king, on our terms, to force him to do what we want and to behave how we think he should.

How poor are human thoughts compared with the thoughts of Christ, while we are worried simply about the here and now, about the things that are passing away. We like Andrew complain about the meager “five barley loaves and two fish”, and all the while Christ is preparing to give us something far greater.

Poor five thousand! If they had had to depend on the disciples, if they looked to man alone, they would not have had a crumb apiece! And Poor Church if she depends on us! We cannot make the meager things we have multiply. We cannot create faith, sustain it, and expand it. The church is utterly dependent upon our Lord of sustenance and salvation. The works and strivings of men are futile: a mere 5 loaves and two fish. But in the hands of Christ, they become a rich banquet fulfilling and lasting.

This great miracle teaches that our Lord, and He alone, has the power to satisfy human hearts. Our Lord can satisfy our human nature, and nothing else can, not the world, sin, pleasure, high position, learning, health, or wealth. Our Lord alone is Bread to us, solid, satisfying, sustaining, living, and life-giving. If we feed upon Him in all that He is and in all that He has done for us, in all His aspects and characters, we shall not want. See the bread multiplying in our Savior’s hands. He goes on breaking so long as the least child remains unsatisfied. We shall find in Christ more than we ever expected to want, we who have wanted more than we ever expected to find. If Christ blesses the meal, the supply will never run short.

And so it is that we gather today, around bread once again. Not because what we place here upon the altar means anything, not because these wafers are a feast by themselves. But because at Christ's command, they become the very bread of life, a bread that is broken but never runs out. A bread that sustains you in your walk through the wilderness by the strength of Christ, your Lord who knows your needs even before you do. A bread that is the very body of Christ given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. A bread that sustains, enlivens, and strengthens. Come eat and be full, taste of the Lord’s bounty.

✠ In Jesus’ name. Amen. ✠