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Pentecost IX & Proper 11
July 21, 2024
Text: Mark 6:30 – 44
Title: Meeting Needs

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Have you ever just had a feeling that you had to get away from everything? The world around you just seems to be completely out of control, and you feel like everything is coming at you at the same time. Responsibilities at work keep building and building. The family schedule is filling up more and more. The “to do” list at the house keeps getting longer and longer as the days pass by, and no matter what you manage to accomplish, the list never seems to get any shorter. You feel like you have as much as you can handle, and if one more thing gets thrown into the mix you’ll just have to scream! Those are the feelings that are beginning to overwhelm you even if it isn’t the reality of your situation.

Suddenly you realize it’s time for a vacation. At the very least, you know it’s time to get away for at least a weekend. It’s time to get away, and so you make your plans and go. And when you come back you feel refreshed and ready to face the world again. It’s amazing how good you can feel after just a little time away.

That’s all that Jesus was really looking for at the start of today’s Gospel reading. He wanted to get away for just a little bit of time. John tells us that He had just finished answering a challenge from the Pharisees, and they were now plotting to have Him killed because they realized that by calling God His Father that He was declaring Himself to be equal to God. On top of that, Mark tells us that Jesus had just received word that His cousin, John the Baptist, had been executed. So Jesus and His disciples got into a boat and crossed the Sea of Galilee, but the people realized what was happening and followed Him. When the boat landed, there was a huge crowd there.

The word about Jesus had spread all over the region. Jesus was doing things that no one else had ever done or could ever do. He was healing diseases that had no cure. Because of Him a man who had not walked in thirty-eight years was able to stand on his own two feet and walk around. When Jesus spoke, it was obvious that He did so with an authority that no one had ever heard before, no wonder they followed Him from one side of the sea to the other. It was obvious to all of them that this man was something special.

So they had followed Jesus to the other side of the sea, and His plan for just a little time away from His work came to an abrupt end. As He sat on the side of the mountain with His disciples, the crowd approached Him. You would think that He would have moved on or at least tried to have the disciples get rid of them so that He could have the break that He wanted. Who could blame Him for telling everyone, “Sorry, but I’ve had it. I just need some time for myself. Meet me at the next town in a couple of days, and I’ll be happy to help you then.” That’s not the way that Jesus handled it though.

Mark tells us that when the Lord saw the great crowd, Jesus’ first response was compassion because the people were like sheep without a shepherd. He saw their needs, and He set His own aside because of His love for them. And so he began to teach them and heal their sick. It’s interesting to note that this particular miracle is one of the only ones that all four of the gospels tell us about.

The time passes with the Lord doing His work, and it finally gets late enough that it’s time to eat. Mark tells us that the disciples came to Him and told Him to send the crowds away to find their own food. Instead of taking the disciples’ cue and using the time as an excuse to send the crowd away to get the break that He originally wanted, Jesus decides that there is still one more lesson to be learned. He instructs the disciples to give the crowd something to eat. Their reaction is predictable. They think that Jesus has to be kidding, and they ask Him “Shall we go and buy two

hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" They're sure that even two hundred days' worth of pay won't be enough to buy what's needed. But even as Jesus is telling them to feed the crowd, John's account tells us that the Lord knew all along what He was about to do. His instructions were a test of the disciples.

It was a test that they failed miserably. They had already witnessed the Lord's miraculous powers, and they still doubted Him. What a disappointment that had to be for Jesus! They were thinking about money and numbers, and wondering what their efforts could possibly do for such a huge crowd of people. They lacked faith, all of them. And then the disciples looked around, and they found five loaves of bread and two fish. You can almost hear the contempt in their voices as they tell Jesus what they have found. It doesn't seem to matter what the disciples have seen with their own eyes or heard with their own ears. Their doubt has led them to a faith that is so weak that it can't even begin to imagine what Jesus is about to do.

Nothing has changed since this test was first failed by the disciples. Each of us can think of any number of times that we can say we've done the same thing. Granted we've never been asked to provide food for over 5000 people in the middle of nowhere, but we have been asked to trust in the power and blessings of God and we've failed. We know that the Lord is Almighty, and we know that means He can do anything that He wants. But do we live our life of faith as though we trust in these facts?

Here's what I mean. The Lord has given us a number of ways to receive His blessings, but we miss or ignore them all too often. He consistently provides for our daily needs of food, shelter, clothing and so on, but we credit ourselves with earning them. And then we worry about how *we* will keep getting these things for ourselves because we fail His test. We place our focus and trust in money and numbers. When we have plenty of money ~~we~~ we feel comfortable and secure, and when

something threatens that money we get anxious and afraid. We rely on ourselves and our efforts just like the disciples did when Jesus asked them to feed the crowd.

But this failure doesn't just apply to our daily needs. It applies directly to our relationship with Christ as well. We have been given a promise that our sins are forgiven when we are repentant of them. But that doesn't stop us from dwelling on them and allowing the guilt of already forgiven sins to come between us and Him. When we repent, and forgiveness is announced, then there are no conditions and the sin is gone. But the devil keeps reminding us of them, and he keeps us questioning whether or not God really did the work that He promised us that He would do. His deception leaves us so broken that we don't forgive ourselves, and we end up doubting whether or not God's forgiveness really was for us. We convince ourselves that we have been so evil that we don't deserve the forgiveness that God has promised for everyone.

We fail His tests over and over again. His sacraments are used to deliver His holy gifts to us, and we treat them as though they don't really matter. We fail to recognize His body and blood present in the bread and wine, and we treat His baptism as though it doesn't really mean anything because it happened so long ago. Or worse yet, we treat it as though it gives us a free pass into heaven and nothing else matters after it.

But Jesus didn't rebuke the disciples for their lack of faith. Instead He took what was available and did something incredible with it. The people were told to have a seat on the grass, and Jesus took the five loaves of bread and the two fish in His hands. He gave thanks to God for what had been provided, and then He started to hand out the food. It got passed around and passed around and passed around. The same five loaves and two fish were spread out among the five thousand men there as well as the women and children – according to Matthew. This small amount of food had the Word of God applied to it, and suddenly it was enough to feed more than five thousand people. Not only was it enough for all of those people, but it was more than enough

because the disciples filled twelve extra baskets worth of food. They learned from this lesson that when the Lord is doing His work and giving His blessings then He is willing to provide everything that we need and even much more.

Nothing has changed since the Lord taught this lesson to His disciples by feeding more than five thousand people. He is still teaching us the same lesson. He does the work that we need to have done for us, and then He provides His blessings in such a way that we receive more than we will ever need. Our cup overflows just like the twenty-third psalm says.

Jesus fed more than five thousand people at one time by the side of the Sea of Galilee, and He does even more than that every day. He provides all of our needs for us in spite of our doubt, and through His mercy He feeds the world every day. There is nothing that we need that He has not provided for us.

But providing our daily needs isn't why Jesus came here. His real purpose was to provide us with a restored relationship to God the Father. That's why He didn't allow the people to make Him king by force. He had something more important to do while He was here. His purpose was to be a sacrifice for your sins. He came to this world so that He could die, and nothing was going to keep Him from that purpose. By His work He provided for our most important needs, and saved us from the condemnation that we deserved.

This is a lesson that He reminds us of throughout our life because we fail His tests so often. He reminds us of His lesson through our baptism which is renewed every morning. The same baptism that ties us to His death and resurrection as His word says in Romans 6. He re-teaches these lessons every time that we receive the Lord's Supper. In these sacraments, Jesus does for us what He did for the people on that day. He gives us more than we will ever need to satisfy our spiritual hunger and thirst, and He strengthens our faith through them. What more do we possibly need? Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.