

Sunday, August 2, 2020

From Pastor Stephen, Zion Lutheran Church, Pembroke, ON

**Welcome:** Welcome to all who are joining us in worship today as our God continues to gather us together as one body in Christ, even when we find ourselves distanced from one another.

Our readings today remind us that the promises God gave to the ancestors of our faith are shared with us as well in our time and place. Together we live in the wonder of God's great kindness and compassion for us all, and our faithful lives become a reflection of the grace of God, alive in the world.

We sing our **Gathering Song:** ELW 510 Word of God, Come Down on Earth

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

**Let us pray:** Glorious God, your generosity floods the world with goodness and you shower creation with abundance. Awaken in us a hunger for food to satisfy both body and heart, that in the miracle of being fed we may be empowered to feed the hungry in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

**First Reading:** Isaiah 55: 1 – 5

A reading from Isaiah.

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

Word of God, word of life. **Thanks be to God.**

**Hymn (Psalm 100):** ELW 883 All People That on Earth Do Dwell

**Second Reading:** Romans 9: 1 – 5

A reading from Romans.

I am speaking from the truth in Christ – I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit – I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh.

They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Word of God, word of life. **Thanks be to God.**

**Song to Welcome the Gospel:** ELW 515 Break Now the Bread

**Gospel:** Matthew 14: 13 - 21

The holy gospel according to Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

Now when Jesus heard about the beheading of John the Baptist, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself.

But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.

When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.”

Jesus said to them, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” They replied, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” And he said, “Bring them here to me.” Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.

And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

The gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

**Homily:** Over the last few Sundays, our readings have spoken to us about how the Kingdom of God, or what Matthew’s Gospel calls the Kingdom of Heaven, comes to us. We also remembered what Luther taught us, that we daily pray in the Lord’s Prayer that God’s kingdom would come through us and that God’s will be done in all that we say or do as Christians. You probably thought you were back in Confirmation class.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus comes by boat after a time alone and encounters crowds who long to see the Kingdom come. They are not disappointed, as Jesus comes bringing healing and peace, wonderful miracles that should have been a sign that he was the

Messiah, the Christ. And since the crowds stayed into the evening, it is likely that many realized just who Jesus was that day.

Except the disciples. Even though they were there, they missed the boat, so to speak. They had the experience of seeing Jesus' miracles, but they missed the meaning.

So, he gives them one more miracle, another sign that he is indeed the Christ, in the hopes of opening their eyes, by feeding the multitudes.

At first, all the disciples could say is that they did not possibly have enough food to feed the crowds. After all that they had seen that day, you would have expected a different response.

But we are not all that different. Day after day, God's miracles unfold before us. People are healed, food is provided, spectacular sunrises and sunsets occur, the earth is watered and produces abundantly, those who die journey home to our loving Heavenly Father...every day we stumble over miracles, our eyes of faith closed to the wonder of it all. Like the disciples we fail to see it, or we have the experience of the miraculous and we miss the meaning. Then nothing will ever be enough to convince us that the miraculous has indeed happened and that the Christ, our Lord, is truly with us and that the Kingdom of God is very near to us.

Every once in a while, God stops being subtle, and the miraculous becomes undeniable...like the moment when the disciples fed the multitudes with five fish and two loaves of bread and picked up twelve baskets of leftovers.

The disciples probably worried about what to do with the leftovers. Someone once asked me what we were going to do with all the

leftovers after a Church pot-luck. I told them we should rejoice. “You are not very helpful”, I was told.

Whenever you look into your refrigerator and see leftovers, you should see the amazing grace of God. As one of my sons once said, his favourite part of the Thanksgiving Dinner was leftovers.

Have you ever noticed that when Jesus hosts a big meal, there are always leftovers? And when Jesus attends a celebration, stale water can be turned into fine wine, which you have to admit is a fairly nifty first miracle for Jesus. I once reminded a Norwegian Lutheran pietist that Jesus had turned water into wine and probably enjoyed drinking it with all the other guests after the miracle. “He was probably having a bad day,” she responded. Apparently, she was suggesting that Jesus did not always behave like a good Christian and was never, ever, the life of the party.

People who eat broccoli without cheese sauce probably have trouble recognizing the kingdom of God in our midst, because they do not expect much in life and God has trouble surprising them or filling them with joy.

We also have a bad habit of explaining away the miraculous. Some like to say that the real miracle the day Jesus fed the multitudes was that people were encouraged to share what they had hoarded and there was enough food for all with an abundance. That is a nice sentiment, but nowhere is that even hinted at in Matthew’s Gospel. Behind all of that is the belief that intelligent, scientific people do not believe in miracles. With that kind of attitude, we are going to be even more difficult to convince than the disciples were, even if God were to send countless miracles our way.

The truth is, miracles do not create faith...it is faith that helps us see that they are signs of the kingdom come among us. In the

end, the greatest miracle is faith that does not need miracles in order to believe. That is why in scripture, faith itself is often portrayed as a miracle...a surprising, unearned, spectacular gift from God.

I have seen faith that seems miraculous in the lives of people who live with great struggles and difficulties, yet still live with devotion to Christ and his church. For some of us, just getting out of bed in the morning could be a miracle, and a great act of faith. That is when it is good to remember that we live by grace alone, and that God is above all else kind and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. If we can remember that always, that might just be the greatest miracle of all. **Amen.**

**Hymn:** ELW 689 Praise and Thanksgiving

**Prayers of the Faithful:** God of compassion, you bring us healing and peace in Christ our Lord, and he becomes for us the bread of life – a precious gift which satisfies our hungry hearts. May we ever delight in your holy gifts and rejoice in your presence forever. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

As you fed the hungry in the wilderness, help us care for all in need. May your generosity with us inspire us to share what we have with others, that all may be fed. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We live in confusing times. Grant us wisdom and discernment as difficult decisions must be made by the Church and the governments we elect. Help us live by faith and banish our fears. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who are recovering from surgery or a time of illness: Hilda Klawitter, Joyce Scheuneman, Joyce Schleen, Marlene Schleen, Murray Schutt, and Dave Stresman, and all in

need of healing. Hold them in your mercy. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of gentleness, we pray for all who struggle with mental illness, made more difficult by this time of isolation and anxiety. Help us care for those who are struggling, grant us patient and understanding hearts and minds. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who are working on vaccinations and treatments during the pandemic and for all who care for those struggling with the virus. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Watch over our loved ones who cannot be with us in these days of physical distancing. We long for the times when we can be together again. Until then, bind our hearts together in the love of Christ, and make us one in him. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things, and whatever else you see that we need, grant us, gracious God.

Gathering all our prayers into one, we pray the prayer that you have taught us:

Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. **Amen.**

**Blessing:** May our Gracious God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless us and keep us in the Risen Life of Christ our Lord. **Amen**

**Sending Song:** ELW 543 Go, My Children

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**