

✠ Jesu Juva ✠

There were Leftovers!

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

Our text is from the Gospel according to St Mark, chapter 8, 'And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. And there were about four thousand people. And He sent them away.' This is our text.

In the Name of Jesus, Who satisfies Your every need.

I don't know about other Christian denominations, but Lutherans are famous for, or is that infamous for, potluck meals. Although, I generally don't call them potluck, because God provides it all through the hands of faithful women and men. He ensures there is a healthy variety and enough. I usually call such a meal a pot-blessing. Have you ever run out of food at a pot-blessing meal? Oh, maybe there were a handful of people remaining to be served when the last scoop of Aunt Bessy's famous scalloped corn with crispy bacon was taken, but there was still plenty to eat. There are always leftovers.

My first or second year in the ministry I had a funeral for a member. There were issues so we didn't have the funeral at the church, but at the funeral home and then the luncheon was just down the street. It was a cold, rainy, miserable day, so few other than family drove to the graveside for the committal. Everybody else went directly to the luncheon and began feasting. When I got back to the community center, one of the ladies from the Ladies Aid came rushing up to me, "Pastor, we're running out of food, so please pray." Running out of food and the family hadn't eaten yet! Guess what I did. Wrong – I didn't pray! I imagine Betty had already been on her knees for several minutes. And guess what, everybody had enough including me. God provided all that was needed and more.

St Mark tells us today about the second of Jesus' feeding a multitude of people. This was a small multitude, only 4000 men not the previous 5000 plus their wives and children (*Matt 15:38*). Jesus has returned to the area east of the Sea of Galilee after healing the daughter of the Syrophenician woman (*Mark 7:24-30*). She was not a Jew, but showed great faith. These people are also for the most part Gentiles, but Jesus goes to them and serves them with the Word, with healing, and with food. Matthew tells us the great crowds brought many lame, crippled, blind, and mute people to Him to be healed. And He healed them all (*Matt 15:30*). And as a result, the people glorified God! God didn't come into the world for the Jews only, but for all people, which includes all of you.

This goes on for three days! They have had nothing to eat. Jesus has compassion on them. He doesn't want to send them away fearing some will faint along the way from hunger. Some of the crowds may have come and gone. People don't necessarily spend three solid days at the North Dakota State Fair or last weekend at Country Fest, but come and go. But then again, at the fair there are vendors peddling what passes for food. But some of the people have been there the entire time with Jesus. Who else has had nothing to eat? Jesus and the disciples. And Jesus couldn't get away.

He has compassion. What is compassion? Is it just feeling sorry for somebody or is it more? It is to be moved in the gut. The related noun means "inward part," such as the liver or gut. But even more. Unlike pity, compassion doesn't end with a feeling. Compassion entails action. St James asks us, "*(James 2:14-16)* What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?" James is clearly describing living faith, but it also describes compassion. Feeling sorry for a person who comes to you in need, but then you tell them to have a nice day and to be sure to come back later might be pity, but it certainly is not compassion.

Don't hear me say two things. First, that you have to drive yourself into the poor house having compassion on every homeless person who comes along. But compassion means taking action. Also I'm not saying that James is commending salvation by works.

Jesus took action. He took action long before it was time for supper. They brought to Him the lame, the diseased, the demon-possessed. Why did they come to Him with all these poor wretches? Because

they believed that He could do something for them. Earlier, Jesus had returned to Nazareth, where He had grown up and His family still lived. St Luke tells us the people despised His preaching and tried to throw Him off the hill (*Luke 4:16-30*). Matthew tells us, “(*Matt 13:58*) And He did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.” Did He have compassion for them? Not so much. He pitied them; He mourned for them because of their unbelief.

Now, with these multitudes did He ignore them? Not at all. They came to Him believing He would help them. He healed them physically, emotionally, and spiritually. How did the crowds respond? “(*Mar 7:37*) And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, ‘He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.’” But even more, Matthew writes, “(*Matt 15:31*) They glorified the God of Israel.” They gave thanks to God for these miracles. They glorified God that He had entered into time and space and healed people. Jesus had said, “(*Matt 5:16*) In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

What are the good works that shine before others? They are our love and compassion for our neighbor. Whether that neighbor is somebody in our family, the man next door, or the grumpy old grouch two houses down. When we show them compassion and love, they see the hand of God at work whether they realize it or not. And if they do recognize His presence and His present, they give God all the credit and glorify Him.

We glorify God not only when a miracle is performed. We glorify Him because He has and continues to provide for our every need. The psalmist sings, “(*Psa 33:1-2a*) Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright. Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre.”

Although Mark doesn’t say it, Jesus proclaimed the Good News of salvation in Himself to them. Always where there is faith, preaching and healing go together. And often times, the third element – feeding – is also present. Jesus taught. He healed. Now, its time to give them sustenance for their bodies as He already has done for their souls. As before, the disciples want to know where they can get enough food to feed all those people in that desolate place. While Jesus did this once before for far greater numbers, but those were the children of Israel, the chosen people; these are not among the ‘good guys.’ These come from the wrong side of the tracks. When Jesus had sent them out before, He specifically told them “(*Matt 10:5b-6*) Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Were they remembering that? In any case, Jesus came for all people. And God provides for all people both believer and unbeliever as we confess in the explanation to the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer – “{*SC III*} God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people; but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.”

Jesus multiplies the loaves and the fish just as He did before. God is at work in creation and He continues to create. John writes, “(*John 1:3, 10*) all things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.... He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him.” He made an eye for the man born blind (*John 9:6-7*). Now, He creates food for thousands out of seven loaves of bread. How is that possible? God is at work! For Him all things are possible (*Luke 1:37*). And there were leftovers.

Was Jesus being wasteful? Couldn’t He have planned more carefully so there wasn’t such an overabundance leading to waste? (Although there wasn’t waste, because they gathered the leftovers for use later.) Of course, He could have counted noses and provided just enough, but that’s not the point. The point is God is among them and us, and He provides everything and more than we need. We worry when the cupboard is bare and so is the checkbook, but God always takes care of us

We confess in the First Article of the Creed – “{*SC II*} He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life.” I’ll repeat that last sentence - “all that I need to support this body and life.”

But He does more. He has called you to faith and sustains you in saving faith through His holy Word and through the Sacrament of the Altar. He comes to you new every time to receive His body and blood. And there are always leftovers. He supplies more grace and mercy than we could ever think to ask for, let alone ever deserve. But that is His compassion for you. He took on human flesh and died to redeem you and to give you life. Not that we deserve it. He’s got enough to give you all you need and for all people who ever have or ever

will live. God shows His compassion as we love our neighbor. Loving our neighbor is like a smile, the more we give it, the more love and smiles we have to share.

Again the psalmist sings, “*(Psa 33:6)* By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host.” God isn’t skimpy when He does things. We might be scratching our heads as we continue through this drought situation. As we struggle to find feed for our cattle? Will the crops amount to anything? Should we just throw in the towel and sell out? I don’t have the answer to those or other questions, but I do know that God is present and He is in control; He will provide you with all you need and the way forward. There are always leftovers of His mercy. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.