

Seventh Sunday after Trinity, July 31, 2022

Readings: Genesis 2: 7-17, Romans 6: 19-23, Mark 8: 1-9

Jesus Restores Paradise and Feeds Us Freely

In the Garden of Eden, our first parents received food freely from the gracious hand of God, apart from any burdensome work (Gen 2:7–17). But after the fall, food would be received only through toil and labor. The curse declared, *“By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground . . .”* (Gen. 3:19). In other words, *“The wages of sin is death”* (Rom. 6:23). But into this wilderness world came Jesus the Messiah to restore creation. Having compassion on the weary multitudes, He renewed the bounty of Eden on the third day, freely granting an abundance of bread to the 4,000 (Mark 8:1–9). So also our Lord Jesus, having endured the burden of our sin, was raised on the third day to bring us back to Paradise. He now miraculously turns the bread of death into the Bread of Life in the Sacrament, giving you His very body and blood for your forgiveness. For *“the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom. 6:23).

Sermon Transcript:

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

Now some of you may be scratching your heads a little bit when you heard the feeding of the 4,000. This is indeed a different event than the feeding of the 5,000. With the 5,000, there were five loaves of bread and two fish. Here, there are seven loaves of bread and a few fish. They don't list how many others. Both of these are recorded in Matthew and Luke. These are two separate events, which makes the disciples' response to Jesus, even that, more sort of humorous. Okay, so this is chapter 8. Chapter 6 in Mark is where we hear the feeding of the 5,000. Now for Mark, we don't know exactly how much time passed from chapter 6 to chapter 8 but same thing in Matthew. It's two chapters before you have the 5,000. And then two chapters later, you got the 4,000. It doesn't seem like a whole lot of time has passed between the two events. So Jesus had fed 5,000 men plus women and children a little bit of time ago. It could have been a couple of months, maybe a full year. We're not really sure, but it couldn't have been many more than like two years, because Jesus only did ministry for three years. So there's not a whole lot of time for these events to take place. In other words, it should have been in the disciples' minds Jesus can indeed feed a lot of people with just a very little bit of food. And yet here we have them, the great crowd gathering. They've been following Jesus for three days now. Three days they were listening to Jesus. So they must have brought some picnic lunches or something with them to last three days-worth, but it's all running out now. But can you imagine? There they were following Jesus for three days in a row, coming out to hear Him preach and teach. They were excited to hear the message, or maybe they were looking forward to another miracle. We don't know what their motivation was, but they were following Him for three days. And He has compassion on them, and He has them sit down. And then what is the disciples' response? Jesus says, "We need to feed them before we send them away, because they've come from distant lands." And the disciples say, "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?" Again, this was at most a year or so after the last time that they fed a group of people in the desolate place with very little food. These disciples are not the brightest bulbs in the pack. They just aren't. This is one of the reasons why we know that we can rely upon what we hear in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, because consistently the disciples say, "And we had no clue what was going on." If you're lying, you

don't make yourself look bad. If you're lying, you're always the hero. You're always the one that gets it right. You're always the one that understands. But the disciples in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John very seldom have a clue about what's going on. They are dumb.

Fortunately, we're in good company. It gives me hope. If Jesus loved them, then there's hope for me because He has compassion on all of us. And He diligently and regularly teaches us, understanding that a lot of times we're going to look at Him and look at the Word of God and say, "I don't get it. How can this work?" But He has compassion. He loves us, and He feeds us, and He nourishes us, not just with bread. In fact, the bread was merely a symbol to get the disciples and everybody else to understand that this is not just some really cool guy. This is not a great teacher. This is something more. This is the Son of God. The feeding of the 5,000, the feeding of the 4,000, all of these were reminiscent of and reminders of the good that God gave us in the garden, which is why the Genesis passage is here.

Now this is the second creation story. This is the specific focus upon Adam and Eve being in the garden that God plants. It's not the broad strokes of creation that we hear in Genesis 1, but it's a specific, where did Adam end up and what was he doing there? So God plants him in the garden, along with all the foods and all the trees, including the tree of life, which is good. And it was promised to us again, when we are in paradise, we will also, again, eat from that tree of life. But also in the midst of the garden was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And there was one law, one rule in the garden: do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Do not eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because on that day, you will die. He had one job, one job: do not eat that fruit. And what did they do? They ate the fruit, because they wanted to determine for themselves what is right and what is wrong. Because unfortunately like Adam and Eve, all of us also are more interested in being taken care of, in finding out what is good for us, in doing what we want to do rather than being fed with the Word of God. We go our own way. Without Christ, we are slaves to impurity, to lawlessness, which doesn't lead to righteousness, but leads to sin and death.

But now we are slaves of righteousness. We are slaves of God. Now I know we don't like that term "slave" here. It doesn't sound right in our ears because if we are a slave, it means that we are to be controlled by something other than ourselves. And we, especially as Americans, don't like to be controlled by anybody. But we, regardless of whether we think we're free or not, we are controlled by something. Either it is our own sinful nature and we are slaves of impurity and our natural limitations, we are slaves to sin, or we are slaves to God. Either way, somebody else is in charge, not you. It's either sin, death and the devil, or it's God.

Now, if it's God, then what are we to do with this? If we have been freed from being slaves of righteousness, which is really onerous... I mean, how many of us have seen in this world the corruption that causes chaos, not only on a global level, but on an individual level? How many families are broken apart? How many individual lives are ruined because of sin and unrighteousness that leads to all sorts of burden in our lives? We're slaves to our impulses, we're slaves to our desires. How does Paul say it? "The things that we ought not to do, that we do. And the things we ought to do, we don't." We are slaves to our impulses unless somebody or something comes and interjects themselves into us.

And fortunately, God has done that because He has had compassion upon us, because He loves us, because He desires us to be nourished by His Word and His Word alone, not to be nourished by our natures and our desires and our wants, not to be nurtured by the cares of this world and the things that the world says are

important: wealth and power and authority. God says, "Those are not things that nurture you. Those are things that enslave you," and they don't enslave you for good.

We are slaves of God, but God is a God of grace, mercy and compassion. And so therefore, we are slaves to grace, getting undeserved benefits from God: life and salvation. We didn't earn them. The wages of sin, the wages that we earn by our sin is death. But notice it's not the wages of a good life is eternal life. So it's not worth, "Okay. I work for sin, or I work for salvation." No. Wages of sin is death; that's what I work for. But the free gift of God is eternal life; that's what I get freely. That's the God that I'm a slave of. He gives generously. Remember the prodigal father who gives his grace and mercy beyond measure to both the wayward son and the arrogant son, both. He gives love, forgiveness; He gives joy and peace. It's not onerous to be a slave to God because even as a slave, I receive such good gifts that I could not possibly earn on my own. As a slave, I receive all the benefits of being a member of the household of God. I am an heir and you are heirs of the promise of God not because you earned it, not because you did anything for it, because it is a free gift.

Adam was placed in the garden. He didn't do anything to deserve the garden. He didn't do anything to deserve the good that was in the garden. It was a gift given to him. He was planted in grace. He lost it by eating the fruit, but Christ regained it on the cross and then gave it to us in baptism as a gift. And now we are back in the garden of Eden. We are back in the promised land. Now, I know it doesn't look like the promised land exactly, but the reality is you are already there. You receive a foretaste, a hint of what it's going to be like in the hearing of the Word, in the hearing of the absolution that your sins are forgiven by God, in the reception of the body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. These are the gifts of the kingdom of God. These are the gifts of the Garden of Eden, the presence of God for us. The fruit of the tree of life is the body and blood of Jesus Christ, which gives us life.

We are eternal creatures right now. We are members of the kingdom of God right now. We are fed in this desolate place that is called this earth where sin and death reign. But not for us because to live is Christ and to die is gain. We are new creatures fed and nourished by God. And no matter what we see on the outside, no matter how desolate it looks out there, in the Word, we know that it is not our place. We are visitors here. Our home is with Christ. Our home is the restored Eden that we will dwell in for all eternity. And so we don't look to our desires. We don't look to our selfish interests. We don't look to lawlessness. We don't look to the chaos of this world. We look to Christ. And through Christ, everything else is taken care of. Even, as we were talking about a little bit in our Bible class, even if we have to suffer in this world for our faith; even if the world hates us, and they do; even if the world persecutes us, and they might; even if we are thrown into prison and beaten, which could happen, we can still rejoice because we know this is not our home.

He fed us in the garden, and then He restores us in this world back to the garden through His generosity of giving of His body and His blood, which the feeding of the 5,000 and the feeding of the 4,000 was a symbol of. Jesus, after the 5,000, speaks of, "You saw the manna from heaven, you saw the feeding of the 5,000, but what you really need is the bread of life, which is My flesh." We have received the fruit of the tree of life. We have been restored as slaves and sons. It's weird. We're sons and we're slaves, but that's not a conflict in God. We're heirs of the promise of everlasting life. It is ours, not later on sometime in the future when we die, but now. You are children of God. He loves you, and He's given you the free gift of eternal life. And the fruit that comes from that: sanctification, love of God. What is the fruit that comes from a good life? Doing the will of God. We don't do it because we have to, we do it because we get to.

"Oh, I've got to be a good person and follow God, and do all the right things, because if I don't..." No, that's not the joy of our salvation. God has saved you. He has forgiven you all of your sins. He has given you life everlasting. He has given you every free gift that you could possibly imagine and more than you could possibly ask for: peace in the midst of trials and tribulations. He has given you all of that. Now, what do you want to do in response? How can you thank Him for these marvelous gifts? How can you thank Him for the nourishment that leads to life? How can you thank Him for taking you out of the kingdom of death into the kingdom of life? How do you get to praise Him for all the good He has done to you? That is our life today. All of this, He does.

Luther says at the end of the first article of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth." What does this mean? And at the very end, he says He gives us our food and clothing, eyes, ears, all my senses and everything that I have and more; and He does this all out of fatherly, divine, goodness, and mercy without any merit or worthiness that is within me, for which it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. Thank Him for what He has done, praise Him for what He has done, serve Him because of all that He has done, and obey Him because it is not onerous to obey the Word of God, which brings peace and joy and comfort.

May that peace and comfort and joy be and abide with you always now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.