

Laetare

31 March, Anno Domini 2019

St. John 6:1-15

Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

It may be Lent, but this is a day of rejoicing. Why? Because this very same Jesus who saw the need of the thousands gathered before Him and provided for them is the same Jesus who sees your need and well provides. There on the mountain Jesus saw the plight of the sinners who had followed Him and rather than leaving them to fend for themselves or chastising them for their foolish lack of preparation, He does what a gracious and loving Savior does - He saves, He provides. It didn't matter that many of them don't rightly believe in Him, as they demonstrated afterward. Even Jesus' disciples remain uncertain about the true nature of Jesus' work and purpose. They see the miracles as nothing more than that - amazing things done to show how amazing Jesus is. "Who is this, that even the wind and the waves obey Him?"

Before us today in all of our readings is the glorious invitation to believe that God will and does graciously provide for us in our time of need. It's not an open question. God will provide for you. It doesn't matter how great or small the need is. God the Father will provide for you. And His provision is not predicated upon our goodness or our righteousness. It is based entirely upon the loving, merciful character of God Himself. That is what makes it certain. That is why you have nothing in this world to fear. You have no need that your heavenly Father will not completely meet in the absolutely best possible way at the perfect time. It doesn't matter how little you think you have. It doesn't matter how impossible the situation may seem. It doesn't matter how exasperated you are. God the Father knows exactly what is best and that is what He will give - guaranteed. "God certainly gives daily bread to everyone, 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."

It is silly and foolish and evil for us to worry - about anything, ever. It is to call God a liar. It was ridiculous for Philip and Andrew to start checking the bank balance or complaining about the insignificance of what God had already graciously provided as though God is a penny-pinching miser who can't stand the thought of parting with His things (like us). We may be stingy but the Lord never gives less than what is needed. It's not as though the disciples were going around

saying “Now, nobody gets seconds until we’re sure that everyone else had some.” Everyone had as much as they wanted - seconds, thirds, fourths. Everyone ate until they were full. They had enough - they had infinitely more than enough. They had Jesus. So do you. The very one asking them where they were supposed to buy bread for the multitudes is the one who created the rain, the crops, the farmers, the bread, the seas, the fishermen, the crowds, and the disciples. More than that, He is the one who showers His care abundantly upon the righteous and the unrighteous alike. And, even more than that, He is the one who offered up His own life as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

Jesus wasn’t simply trying to impress everyone by this or any of His other miracles. He is demonstrating with perfect clarity the nature of God as the Giver of every good and perfect gift. He wants to erase all doubt in your mind that He will provide each and every day precisely what you need for that day - food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home.

But do you avail yourself of the love of your heavenly Father? Do you ask when you have need - any need? Do you pray and confess that all good things come from the hand of God? Is your health suffering? The Lord Jesus, whose flesh has risen from the grave to eternal life, will provide for you. Is your family turned against itself? The Lord Jesus, who suffered the betrayal of some of His own family and closest friends, will provide for you. Does your whole life just seem to be spinning out of control and it feels as though you are being dragged along by forces that care nothing about you? The Lord Jesus, who was constantly rejected, who suffered the spitting and punching and blasphemy of His enemies, will provide for you. Does it feel as though God Himself has turned away from you and forsaken you? The Lord Jesus, who tasted the bitter gall of God’s wrath against sin, will provide for you. There isn’t a single one of us here today who doesn’t have some need. Do not worry. Do not be afraid. Sit at Jesus’ feet. He will provide. Receive with joy what He gives because it is exactly what you need. Believe that Jesus shows you the true heart of your heavenly Father - a gracious and compassionate heart always at the ready to provide for those who are in need.

St. James writes in his epistle to the Church “You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.” (James 4:2b-3) Day after day goes by when we worry and wring our hands and stress about the unknown future or the sins of the past or maybe even just the chaos of the present. And even when we know we are powerless to do anything about it, we still either expect that our help is going to come from somewhere else in this world or that there is no help and we are just doomed to

suffer. Dear children of God, ask. Make your requests known to God. Cry out to Him. Seek His help. You are His beloved Baptized. You are the heirs of His gracious kingdom. Stop acting as though God didn't promise to hear you when you call to Him and to answer and deliver you. Stop living as though God is some kind of tyrant who cares nothing for you. Behold, Jesus, doing exactly what His heavenly Father, your heavenly Father, wants done - helping those who are in need, lavishing upon them what they need in abundance. And many, maybe even most, of them wanted the wrong thing from Him, wanted nothing more than bread and whatever other earthly benefit He might be willing to give. It didn't matter. The help of God comes from His unchanging goodness, not your always fickle weakness.

But Christ offers far more than simply bread to fill your stomach. That is why He has drawn you here again this day. Let's say God were to give you every ounce of earthly wealth your heart desired. What then? Your sinful heart would still not be content. With Philip and Andrew you would still say "It's not enough." And you will still die. You will still be faced with the reality that no amount of wealth or earthly comfort will be able to satisfy the debt of your sin or quiet your guilty conscience when death draws near. And then what? If the only thing your heart really desires from God is more bread, more money, more luxury, more beauty, more power - then Christ will remove Himself from you as He did from the crowd because that's not why He came. That's not the kind of king that He is or will be for you because that's not the kind of king you need.

That is the kind of king the devil is happy to be for you. If he can keep your soul satisfied with goodies and pleasures and creaturely comforts then he will be more than happy to provide those things. And through them, he will blind you. He will work to convince you that once you have whatever x, y, or z your heart desires, then you can rest assured that all is well with God and the only thing you need to worry about is building bigger barns to hold your treasures. He does not want you to feel your sin. He doesn't want you to look deep into the mirror and see just how empty you are - completely devoid of all righteousness which is a problem that no amount of money or happiness or convenience will ever be able to solve. And if life is nice and comfortable, why would you bother examining your life in light of the Ten Commandments, why face those skeletons? What need do you have of a Savior if the biggest problem you have is feeling a little cramped in your house or noticing that your clothes are no longer in fashion?

To such a person, Jesus Christ is nothing more than a nice ornament to pin on your life. You'll pull Him out when it's convenient but otherwise you're equally as

comfortable putting Him back in a drawer, leaving your Bible up on a shelf, and letting day after day go by, week after week, without prayer, without hearing and studying God's Word, without receiving the Holy Supper - all of the priceless treasures Christ won for you by shedding His Blood on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins.

Christ Jesus has come that you might have life, eternal life. He came to shower upon you the forgiveness of all your sins, as much as you need until your conscience is overflowing with peace. There is nothing in this world that could even hope to offer you that. Not even all of your efforts or good works can help you to that end. If you hope that the Law will save you, if you hope that you can placate God by trying your hardest and showing Him that you mean well, you will be sorely disappointed. It is not the hearers of the Law who are righteous, but the ones who do the law - all of it...perfectly. The Law has as much ability to save you as the bread you buy at the store. Indeed, it is good. You ought to live according to it. You need the Law to show you how dearly you need that which Jesus comes to give - His Flesh and Blood for the life of the world. That bread, which has come down from heaven, is the only bread that gives eternal life because it is Life, it is Christ Himself. This is Bread which makes one righteous. This is the Bread which endures, unlike the manna in the wilderness or the manna on the hillside.

And this is the Bread which Christ offers to you this day not simply to satisfy your rumbling stomach, but to satisfy all who hunger for righteousness and peace. This Bread has been given to you for you. And as Christ gave the crowds bread enough that all were satisfied, all had as much as they needed, so He gives to you forgiveness and mercy and life as much and more than you need. He does not want you doubt your salvation. He doesn't want you seeking somewhere else to be reconciled to God. He doesn't want you sitting at a different table, filling your belly with bread that cannot save you. His desire is that all take their place at this table in true faith and receive in true faith His promise which He has joined to the bread and wine.

So let us rejoice! Let us rejoice in the abundant mercy of God in Christ Jesus who has prepared this table of salvation before us in the midst of this wilderness that we might not die, but have everlasting life.

In the Name of +Jesus.