

Laetare

14 March, Anno Domini 2021

St. John 6:1-15

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

There are so many good things that our Lord lavishes upon us every single day. Not only did He in love and mercy create us (something He certainly didn't have to do), but He sustains us and continues to care for us and give us the things that we need. Let's recite together those familiar words from the meaning of the First Article. Open your hymnals to page 322. Now, hear those words again - "He RICHLY and DAILY provides me with all that I need to support this body and life." I hope those are familiar words to you and hope they bring the rich comfort they are intended for. The Lord's care extends beyond just giving us enough to barely live. He lavishes His blessings upon us in different times and different ways. But every day He gives each of us what is good and what is needed. Have you ever thrown away food that has rotted while it sat in the fridge? Are their containers of leftovers sitting in your fridge? Have you gotten rid of clothes that still have tags on them? Have you had to get rid of old furniture to make room for new? And who hasn't ended up throwing away those amazing deals that you just had to have but ended up never using? And, what's more, God demands nothing in return. He doesn't ask if you REALLY need it. He doesn't ask what you're going to do with it. He just gives....and gives....and gives. And not just to believers. He makes the rain fall and the sun shine on the righteous and the unrighteous alike.

And, of course, our mouths are filled to overflowing with thanks and praise. No. All this and yet we grumble. We complain. We are filled with worry and doubt. We cry that it isn't enough. We act like the foolish and unbelieving Israelites - "I'd better take a little more than I need because while God is feeding me today, I can't be sure that He will tomorrow." We grouse about how tight things are while we flip through hundreds of cable channels waiting for our kids to finish playing their Xbox so that we can run them to their next practice. Our greed and doubt run deep. Before we have finished the meal in front of us we are busy worrying about the next one. We obsess about tomorrow when we don't even know if there is going to be a tomorrow. "Will I have enough to retire comfortably? Will I have enough to send the kids to college? Will my family be taken care of if I die? Will we have enough for the kids to have a new wardrobe for the school year?" We live in the constant desperation of Philip "Where are we ever going to get enough? (And mind you, they were trying to feed thousands of people!)" With Andrew we

despise what we have been given "Well we DO have this bread and these fish, but that's really nothing."

Repent. God always gives what is needed. He gives you enough and with however much or little He gives He will take care of you. The same God who rained down manna and quail in the wilderness, the same God who made water come gushing out of a rock, can and WILL provide for you. Why then are you discontent or worried? Such discontent proves nothing about God or His goodness. It only exposes that our god is our belly. It proves how shortsighted we are and how little we think of God. We only worry about earthly things because we love them and seek our happiness in them. Every complaint, every worry, every desperate sigh accuses God of lying and stealing.

We are like the crowds, like Philip, like Andrew. We are more concerned about our bellies than our souls. We love creation rather than the Creator. We think little of the things that God has blessed us with, always assuming that it's never enough. We pour out our lives, our efforts, our energy, our money, our time on earthly things that are meaningless and temporary while the things of eternal life are lucky to get a passing thought and whatever is left over after we and the world have taken all that we want. We exasperate our children and drive them to be successful workers and athletes, relentlessly whipping them to do better and more but we will hardly take the time to pray with them, to bring them church every week, to talk about the things of salvation, to stir up in them a fervent desire to hear God's Word and receive the Lord's life-giving Body and Blood. We fool only ourselves and do eternal harm to our children if week after week the Lord's Day finds us despising the preaching of God's Word and Holy Communion because we have other things to do. We give lip service to the importance of God but with our feet, our hands, and our hearts we preach a very different truth to our heavenly Father. Or, as God Himself puts it "They honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me."

Yet, for all that, for our grumbling and despising and greed, Jesus still gives. He fed all those people in the wilderness knowing full well that they would miss the point and want Him to just keep filling their bellies. He healed ten lepers knowing only one would come back and give thanks. He offered His life as a ransom for the sins of all people knowing how many would reject Him and the forgiveness He offers. He has washed countless numbers in the waters of Holy Baptism and given to them the inheritance of eternal life only to watch them walk away to eternal destruction. He has placed His Body and Blood into mouths that turn around and deny Him and the Word He has spoken.

And still, Jesus gives. He gives because He loves. He gives to you because He loves you and He wants you and your children to live now and in eternity. Yes, He gives you daily bread but He didn't leave heaven just to do that. Our Savior didn't need to take on human flesh and blood to sustain our earthly life. He came because He knew that no matter how full we are of this world's pleasure, we are still empty. He came because He knew that no matter how full a belly we may have, no matter how involved we may be, no matter how hard we work, no matter how moral we pretend to be, we are still dead - dead in sin, dead in our trespasses and our guilt. Our hunger for worldly pleasure and security often blinds us to our need for redemption and forgiveness so that we do not hunger for the means of salvation that God spreads out before us like a banquet table during the Divine Service.

Jesus, the Shepherd and Bishop of your soul, has come that you may have life and have it to the full. Jesus comes to give what nothing in this world can ever give you - the true Bread from heaven which He has given for the life of the world, His Flesh which is true food and His Blood which is true drink. He has given His perfect life as a payment for the sins of the whole world. He has come healing, feeding, dying, and rising so that you might know the will of God is to save you and give you EVERYTHING you need. He has given the Office of the Holy Ministry to continue His work of giving. He has given Baptism to wash away sin and give new life as a child of God. He gives food that fills hungry souls with righteousness and the assurance of God's mercy. He gives the forgiveness of your greed and your complaining and your grumbling. He gives the forgiveness of your unbelief and doubt. Here in the green pastures of the divine liturgy the Lord Jesus bids you to sit down and receive the good and abundant gifts that He has prepared for you.

Praise be to God if you hunger for these things! But if you do not then I strongly urge you to ask yourself why and then read Luther's advice from the Small Catechism (read from Christian Questions and Answers). Don't think so little of your Lord that you want nothing more from Him than things that perish and cannot save you, things that cannot take away the death of sin. Dear children of God, your Father bids you this day to be seated - to rest in the assurance that He will and has provided for you and receive as much of His mercy and grace as you need to be satisfied. He has provided more than enough as often as you need it.

In the Name of +Jesus.