

Laetare

27 March, Anno Domini 2022

St. John 6:1-15

Pr. Kurt Ulmer

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

What a wonderful time for us to hear again of Jesus feeding the multitudes. We have all been constantly thinking and talking about inflation, higher prices at the pump, exorbitant car prices, and empty shelves at the grocery store. “What are we going to do? What if prices keep going up? What if the government doesn’t fix this mess or just keeps making everything worse? What if I get sick and need medicine that we can’t afford? What will we do? How will we make it?” The situation drives people either to despair or to assume that they can somehow prepare themselves out of whatever crisis may or may not be looming.

Dear children of God, I know that many of you are worried. Some of you have lived through very hard economic times and dread to see them again. Some of us have never really suffered the hardships that may lie ahead and can’t fully appreciate the sacrifices that may have to be made. But the simple truth of the matter is that, while you don’t know what tomorrow is going to bring, you know God. He has revealed to you through the teaching and working of Jesus that His concern for you is absolute and it is for all of you, the whole you, body and soul. He has made clear in His Word that He sees each and every need you have and has already prepared to meet them all. He is no tyrant. He doesn’t take some kind of twisted pleasure in watching you suffer and squirm. He is the gracious Father of the baptized and causes the rain to fall on the the righteous and unrighteous alike.

All too often we think of God as being only concerned with “spiritual” things. He gives us forgiveness and promises us eternal life. That’s all fine and good but what about my clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home? Who’s going to take care of those things? Consequently, like the Israelites, we turn somewhere else, we find our own Moses-es to cry out to for help when we are hungry or thirsty rather than calling upon God in every trouble. We put our trust in princes or the right investment strategies or being able to provide for ourselves.

Do you not believe the manna and the quail? Do you not believe the loaves and the fish? The truth is actually worse. We doubt the cross. We doubt the revelation of God’s forgiveness. We don’t trust that God is who He says He is and will do what He promises to do. We wrongly distinguish what happened on the cross from

our earthly, bodily existence as though the death and resurrection of Jesus has nothing to do with our daily bread.

This false distinction that we make between our bodies and our souls leads us to artificially separate our spiritual and physical needs and, even worse, to imagine that God doesn't care for and provide for the whole you. You are the whole you - body and soul - that God knit together in your mother's womb. You are not, as some teach, a soul that was eternally floating around in the universe that one day God joined to a physical body as so many of the pagan new-age religions. The day you were conceived you are at one and the same time a spiritual and physical being. When you suffer, the whole you suffers, not just the body or just the soul. When your body is afflicted with COVID or cancer, despair and doubt and fear are close at hand. When your conscience is wracked with guilt, your heart literally hurts and tears flow from your eyes. Famine and poverty and disease and war and death - what we would categorize as physical afflictions - are rooted in the very so-called spiritual affliction of sin. Your body and soul are inextricably linked together. The needs of one are the needs of both. Sin is all-consuming. It's not a spiritual problem. It's a whole-you, body and soul problem.

Thus, when your Father cares for one, He cares for both. When Jesus fed the 5000 with bread and fish, the very same food that filled their growling stomachs was meant to preach to their souls (and now ours) that God is gracious and will provide for ALL of their needs as He had in that very moment. Every physical good you receive in this life should be a constant reminder of that. When you put on your comfortable clothes in the morning, when you pour your coffee, when you flip on the light switch, when you greet your neighbor - in all these you ought to see the gracious hand of God who bestows these and so many other rich blessings upon you better than you even know how to ask and without your always giving proper thanks. And seeing these things, we ought to immediately then be mindful again of the eternal life that God has provided us through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The two are not unrelated. Indeed, when you turn on that shower remember the waters of Holy Baptism that have washed you clean of the actual filth of your sin. When you dress remember that you have been clothed in the royal robes of Christ's righteousness. When you eat remember the Bread of Life who came down from heaven, by Whose Word alone you live, and Who gives you His Flesh to eat and His Blood to drink.

But notice that God cares for you spiritually and physically always using physical, created means. When God ministers to your belly He gives you bread and meat. When He ministers to your soul He speaks words into your ears, He pours water

over your body, He puts bread and wine into your mouth. His merciful care is lavished upon your entire being together. His care for both is the same. And in both cases, the little that you think you have is more than sufficient when they are from the hand of God.

Consider Jesus Himself. He didn't come as a disembodied soul. He came as a man. As we confess in the Athanasian Creed, He was, and still is, composed of a rational soul and human flesh. He was physically born. He suffered physical hunger. He wept true tears of sorrow. He ate physical food. He felt the physical pain of the scourges, the thorns, and the nails. He died in the flesh and He rose again in the flesh. All this so that the whole of you, in Him, would be redeemed.

Your Father is a God of compassion. He sees needs and He meets them - all of them. The multitudes of Israel and the crowds in the wilderness did not lack what was necessary. There was enough for all and even extra even as at the wedding at Cana Jesus blessed the celebration with an abundance of wine. But what we are meant to understand and believe is that they didn't lack anything BEFORE the miraculous food was set before them because they had the gracious SOURCE of that food in their midst - the Lord Jesus, the true bread that has come down from heaven. Our sinful flesh, forever operating as though we know nothing more of God than Mt. Sinai, lives in the utter terror that good comes to us only on the basis of the Law, not on the basis of God's mercy.

And that is terrifying because the Law clearly shows us that we DESERVE no good thing. We've done nothing to deserve bread or the Gospel. Just the opposite, in fact. We've done plenty to earn God's wrath and displeasure. Our bitter grudges, our lack of repentance, our spiteful words, our lack of thankfulness, our failure to pray, our doubt of His Word, our lack of concern for those in need. These have deserved something, most certainly - God's righteous and eternal wrath. To chase after daily bread either in fear or in greed is a deeply spiritual problem. To fear the end of your life on this earth is deny the promise of the resurrection to eternal life. For the baptized to engage in such coveting and idolatry reveals a heart that does not believe that the Jesus who fed the multitudes is our God or that the the compassion of God which we see manifested in Jesus is actually true of God. And this lack of trust in God, a lack of being satisfied not simply with what God gives but a lack of being satisfied with God Himself, is the root of all other sin - anger, sexual immorality, lying, greed, grumbling, gossiping, idolatry, failure to prayer, despising of God's Word. All sin begins in the spiritual and manifests itself in the physical. Adam and Eve doubted the Word of God and ate the fruit.

Repent and stop doubting that God is exactly who you see there on the mountain graciously and plenteously feeding the multitudes without a question of whether or not they deserve it. Stop doubting that God can feed and provide for you with whatever little you think you have. Five loaves and two fish were more than enough to feed thousands when placed in the hands of God. If it were necessary, God could and would bring quail to you in the evening and bread in the morning. More importantly, stop doubting that God is exactly who you see on Mount Golgotha, giving His life as a ransom for poor, grumbling, covetous sinners like us. He is the only answer to every fear and every need that you have. Believing this Jesus, through whom your heavenly Father has blessed you with every blessing, believing that every ounce of God's righteous judgment against you has been laid on Christ, believing in the uncompromising and unwavering love and mercy of God revealed on the cross, nothing remains to cause you fear or worry - not long gas lines, not a crumbling monetary system, not empty grocery store shelves, not the threat of a virus or organ failure, not times of hardship or uncertainty, not the hatred and persecution of the world, not the devil, not your guilt, not even death. Your Father doesn't want you to worry. He doesn't want you to fear. Jesus died for you to remove fear. Let His perfect love for you cast out your fear. Yes, on the one hand you have needs. But on the other hand, when you know Christ by faith, when you believe that God is as gracious and merciful and compassionate and forgiving as He tells you and shows you He is, you have no need because you know that God has already promised to meet every last one of them. That is what it is to know God as Father - it is to know Him as source. He is the good from which every other good comes. Without Him, there is nothing good, no matter how full your belly is.

Dear beloved people of God, children of the heavenly Father, rejoice! Worry and doubt and fear and grumbling are for those who have not sat at the feet of Jesus and tasted His goodness and love for them. You have been filled to overflowing with the graciousness and mercy of God. Every need of your body and your soul has already been more than met in Jesus. Why do you hunger for that which does not satisfy? Having more daily bread will not bring you peace. Having more of Jesus will - hearing more of His Word, praying in the full confidence of your forgiveness and His love for you, meditating more on His Passion. Come and receive from your merciful Savior's hands every ounce of true and everlasting good that He can give you - Himself. Having been invited to sit down and receive into your hungry ears His gracious teaching, now open your mouths to receive from His hand the food that gives eternal life and fills your bodies and souls with peace.

In the Name of +Jesus.

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keeps your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus.