

The Seventh Sunday after Trinity
13 July, Anno Domini 2024
St. Mark 8:1-9

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

Beloved of God,

St. Mark's account of Jesus' concern and love for those who had followed Him is so clear and so beautiful that only the coldest heart would refuse to find some comfort in it. The evangelist has very simply proclaimed to us that Jesus cares for His children, that He cares for those who are need. He cares about your need before you do. He understands better than you do what relief is best. And He already knows how He will supply that relief.

Dear Christian, this is the Christ in whom your faith rests! This is how He wants you to know Him. Don't imagine that He is actually something other than the Jesus who met the need of those thousands of people in the wilderness that day. He always has been, always will be, and is today merciful and compassionate. He doesn't turn a blind eye to the needs of your body. Your earthly need is just as real and important to Him as the needs of your soul. And if you can trust the Lord to supply something as simple as temporal bread for your belly, is there any reason to doubt that He will also provide completely for something as eternal as your salvation? What reason would you have to doubt Him? Time and again throughout His ministry Christ shows Himself to take great joy in providing for those in need - the blind, the lame, the outcast. This is who Christ is. And this is who your Heavenly Father is.

Our doubt and our worry stem from our hesitation to believe that this is how Jesus is toward us. When we get anxious about what we are going to eat or what we are going to wear or about anything else, we are allowing ourselves to believe that this is either an inaccurate or incomplete picture of our Savior. We are confessing that even though He may have done that at other times and for other people, He is just as likely to ignore us or, worse, to deal with us according to our sins. Repent. That isn't Jesus. That isn't the character and nature and glory of the one Triune God. As St. Paul says of our Lord Jesus Christ in Colossians "In Him the fulness of the deity dwells bodily." And just a few verses earlier in that same letter the apostle writes "He is the image of the invisible God." What you see Jesus doing and saying is exactly what the Father wills and has given Jesus to do and to say.

There is no difference or disagreement between the two.

When your conscience is afraid, when you are worried about your daily bread, look at this Jesus who had compassion on the crowds in their need and provided miraculously with even the insignificant resources they had available. He looks no differently upon you. It was compassion that drove Him to have those eyes that looked out upon the crowds, feet that stood upon that mountain, hands that held the bread and the fish. The Lord Jesus is filled with compassion for all who are in need and that includes you. He doesn't help only the deserving (because there aren't any). He doesn't wait for us to ask (because we are so reluctant to). He doesn't withdraw His help because we are unthankful (thanks be to God for that!). He helps because He is the gracious and merciful Lord who creates and sustains all things with His righteous right hand. You are never the cause of His compassion. You are the recipient.

You have no actual reason to doubt the goodness and provision of God. Even though sometimes you have had to wait on your bread, God has always given it. If He waits you can be sure that it was good for you to wait. It doesn't mean that God failed to provide or to see your need. He simply met it in an even better way than you had asked. You don't always receive what you asked for because God loves you more than that. He won't give you less than good. Search the Scriptures and you will find that the Lord has always met the needs of His children. He didn't create you to torment you or to simply watch you squirm. If He brings you to a time of need, as He did the crowds, it is so that you will remember that you need Him above everything else and that you have nothing unless He, in His mercy, gives it.

Let what you have heard of Christ today comfort you, beloved children of God! That's why it is given. That's why the Holy Spirit led Mark and the other evangelists to record it - so that all false ideas about God's love and His desire to help you can be put away; so that you can be certain that even if He needs to suspend the Laws of nature to give you what you need, He will because His promises will never fail. So stop your worrying. Stop allowing your heart to be overrun by anxiousness about whatever it is that you think you need or that you think is destroying you. Your Savior knows even better than you do and He will provide.

And there is something else that we shouldn't overlook in today's Gospel. Did you notice that the crowds weren't asking for food? If they were at risk of fainting on the way home, they hadn't had food in a while. But that didn't matter! They

weren't thinking about food. There was one thing on their minds - the teaching of Jesus. That was all that mattered. They were so completely absorbed in what Jesus was telling them about the gracious kingdom of God, about the promises which God was fulfilling, about our need for salvation that they didn't care about anything else. They weren't in a hurry to leave and get a good seat at the diner.

This is faith's response to hearing the Word of God and being with Christ - it doesn't care about anything else because nothing else can bring the gifts which Christ brings in His doctrine. True faith recognizes in the Word of Christ the greatest treasure imaginable, the most precious gift that can be given or desired. It simply can't get enough. It always wants more, not less. Faith isn't bored by doctrine. Faith's object is doctrine - the pure teaching of Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, who draws near to the weak, the despairing, the broken, the destitute to lift them up and comfort them, who alone has the words of eternal life.

These folks spent at least two nights away from home, away from their businesses and other obligations just to hear the Word of life! They slept outside with their children in the wilderness. Contrast that with us who are making sure that we get our stop watches out Sunday morning; who find every means available to distract ourselves during the sermon - reading the bulletin, talking with others in the narthex, playing on our phones; who can't leave church fast enough because we have more important things to do and we have checked the box. "Three entire days of just listening to Jesus?! That's over the top. We have important things to do!" Such an attitude toward Christ and the Word is arrogance and unbelief. It leads us to despise preaching, hearing the Word of God at home, studying the Word of God when the opportunity is provided, and encouraging others to do the same.

You do not live by bread alone or anything else in this world. Your life comes from the Word of God which raises you from the dead. Christ comes to you through the Word and in no other way. He speaks and in believing the joyous good news of our salvation which He accomplished on Calvary's cross, you are saved, you are reconciled to God! This is meant to bring every sinner the kind of joy that makes the whole host of heaven break forth in songs of praise and thanksgiving.

It is the devil and our flesh who would rob us of the Word, who will put every excuse and distraction in our way so as to minimize if not stop completely our exposure to the one thing that is able to rescue us from death and give us the

forgiveness of our sins, life, and salvation. You can have everything the world has to offer and still have nothing. Let Adam and Eve teach you. God withheld only one thing from them. All the rest of creation in its perfection and beauty was theirs to use and enjoy. And what did Satan do? He caused them to despise God's Word. He called God a liar and convinced them that what God had spoken wasn't enough. They believed him and they died and all of humanity with them. Satan hasn't stopped lying. He knows that the Word of God is life. Therefore everything he does has as its one goal to rob man of God's Word. There isn't anything he won't offer or promise in order to draw you away from hearing and believing the Word of God. He is good, the best, at what he does and if you think you are immune, you've already fallen.

If nothing else, let this alone be your reason to hear and meditate on the Word of God every day - Satan hates it and is trying to take it away from you. Take it up. Study it. Pray on the basis of it. Memorize it. It is the weapon which God has given you over sin and death and the devil. These things cannot stand the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They are powerless before it. Treasure it above all other things and joys and even people in this world. Let the things of this world be as nothing to you compared to the Word of your Lord. Let them all be gone. Because it is only by this Word that you know God's rich mercy and abundant compassion for you. It is by this Word you know that God takes no pleasure in your destruction but in your salvation. By this Word God has declared you to be righteous, forgiven, and a child of God.

May God the Holy Spirit stir up in each of us such a fervent love and desire and faith in His Word that nothing in this world can distract us from it and that it alone is our true treasure and joy. And may you daily find fresh comfort and peace in the Lord Jesus Christ who has compassion on your every need.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keep you hearts and your minds and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.