

The Seventh Sunday after Trinity with the Rites of Holy Baptism and
Confirmation for Kirk Swoverland
St. Mark 8:1-9
3 August, Anno Domini 2025

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

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

It is a pattern nearly as old as the world itself. Ever since man grew weary of the
paradise in which he was placed and sought to improve on what God had done,
God has had to bring us into times of need to break through our haughtiness.
Consider Israel led by God into the wilderness after being graciously taken out of
Egypt. Or the many times during the time of the judges when God gave Israel into
the hands of their enemies to pull them out of their idolatry. We regularly have to
be reminded that we are ultimately powerless to help ourselves, that the Word of
God alone is true, and that our entire existence comes from and is sustained every
day by God. Even though we are surrounded by the goodness of God, our hardened
hearts have grown blind to it. We forget God and imagine that we are masters of all
and have no need of God to protect us, to provide for our daily bread, and certainly
not to save us. We try to take the glory for our life, our abilities, our successes, and
even our salvation. We foolishly think we know best and that we actually have the
power to bring about our own will.

And so day after day, we try to handle things the way we think is best. God isn't
giving us what we want when we want it so we decide in our minds to get it
anyway because we are convinced that what we want is good and is absolutely
what we need. "Who is God to tell me 'No'?"

God is He who knit you together in the womb of your mother. Was it you who
brought you into existence? Was it you who cared for you before your mother even
knew she was pregnant? God is He who created the sun, the moon, and the stars by
the breath of His mouth and causes them to rise and set in their appointed courses
each day. Did you call forth the sun this morning? Did you cause the rain to fall?
Did you ensure that the farmer had seed to plant or did you cause the grain to
sprout and grow?

How foolish and prideful and thankless we are to imagine that a single breath
passes into our lungs outside of the almighty providence of the eternal God, the

great “I AM”, the Alpha and the Omega, He who has no beginning and will have no end! When Adam opened his eyes for the first time how astonished he must have been to be surrounded by the beauty and magnificence and order of all creation! And what did he contribute to any of it? What advice did he offer to God? Absolutely nothing. Those things existed before him so what possible credit could he take? None, of course. The merciful and loving hand of God had fashioned ALL of creation according to His perfect wisdom and will. And then, when all others things were good, God fashioned man in His own image, after His own likeness and breathed into Adam’s nostrils the breath of life so that Adam BECAME a living creature. Adam had only to receive all that lay before Him from the hand of the God who created it all, including his own existence. Nothing that Adam needed was withheld from him. Every tree and plant yielding seed was given to him for food, save the one - the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But even that was a gift from God. It was the way that Adam and all mankind could acknowledge and worship God as God - believe His Word “You shall not eat of it...” and obey. And in the beginning, obeying that word was sheer delight to Adam.

That is no longer true. We are never satisfied. Indeed, the good, true, and beautiful things that God gives we turn our noses at in disgust and the evil things that He forbids we engorge our bellies with until we are brought into eternal death. We ignore our Creator. We call His commands evil, intolerant, outdated. Rather than our eyes looking toward God and expecting every good thing, our eyes are cast inward upon our own greed and lust and desire for pleasure and what is easy. We don’t want to love because love isn’t about me. How can I love myself and make myself happy if I am busy loving my neighbor, helping and supporting him in every physical need, helping him to improve and protect his possessions and income? “No,” we tell ourselves, “I know a better way.” And we trot off and enslave ourselves to our jobs so that we can have more money, bigger houses, more vacations, nicer cars, more comfortable retirements, the latest fashion trends, and the praises of men. We spend countless hours staring at our phones and televisions, running on treadmills, going to practices but then can’t seem to find the time to call upon God with our families or bring them to the holy house of God to hear His Word, to be absolved our sins, to eat the food of salvation, and to sing the praises of the One who died for us. How easy we find it to curse those in authority over us, to mock those who we disagree with, to sing along with musicians who unabashedly blaspheme the name of the Lord and glorify all kinds of perverse behaviors but we find it awkward to talk to our children and our neighbors about Jesus, to praise our spouses, to pray with our fellow Christians in their times of joy and times of need.

All these things because we have exchanged the worship of the Creator for the worship of creation. We fret over food and drink and clothing but give hardly a second thought to our salvation.

Praise be to God who doesn't simply let us die in our foolishness and arrogance. Instead, in His great mercy, He draws us out in the wilderness where all those things that we love and trusted in and chased after are gone. He takes away the idols in which our heart took solace, and though we kick and scream and insist that we cannot do without them, He loves us enough to show us that these things are nothing, vanities. Health, wealth, prestige, grades, addictions, awards - not a single one of them can help you. None of them love you.

Jesus does. Jesus created you. Jesus bled and died for you. No one else. You don't need food, doctors, followers, degrees, or rulers to make your life better or save you. You need Jesus who may make use of these good gifts but certainly doesn't require them. What a foolish question the disciples asked - "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?" And we can mock them all we want but we constantly ask the same thing. Every time we worry. Every time we reach out to take that which God has forbidden us in His Commandments. Every time we complain and grumble about the life we have, the troubles we have, the little that we have - we confess our own foolishness and our blindness to the Creator whose workmanship we are and from whose gracious hand every need is met. We deny the God in whose presence we stand this day, who promised us our daily bread, who willingly took upon Himself our flesh so that He could take upon Himself our sin and suffer and die for it, not so that our bellies would be full, but so that we would be spared the eternal torments of hell and filled instead with His life and the joy and beauty and peace of His gracious kingdom. So that we might live and flourish in that kingdom in those things that are truly good - love and compassion and mercy, family, vocation, faithful stewardship, building and creating and growing.

Dear children of God, take your eyes off of creation and lift them up to behold the One who put the stars in their place, who set a boundary for the ocean, and who has counted every last hair on your head. You are not impoverished, even if you have nothing. You have enough because you have Jesus. Every need that you feel, is a loving reminder from your heavenly Father that He is your good, that you live by His Word and not by bread.

How beautifully we are reminded of that again today. It is alone by God's great

love and mercy that Kirk has received the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. Every day of Kirk's earthly life was carefully watched over by His Creator to bring him to this moment, this day, when the guilt of his sins was washed away, when the gates of heaven are opened before him, when the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out upon him, and when the Father said "Kirk, you are my beloved son with whom I am well-pleased. You have this day been baptized into the death of my Son, Jesus, and this day you have been raised with him to walk in newness of life. Though it was a winding path, My eye was watching over every step and My good and gracious will brought you to see your own need for me and the eternal life and peace that only I can give you and joyfully bestow upon you this day. And not just today, but every day that you remember the promises I have made to you this day. These mercies are new to you every morning. And having been made My child, I now call you to My table to feed you the very bread of heaven with your brothers and sisters." Kirk, this day all of heaven and earth rejoice to hear the confession of faith in Christ which you speak and sing praises to the blessed and Holy Trinity who has put that faith in your heart and that confession on your lips. As St. Paul so clearly and beautifully says in Ephesians chapter two "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." None of gathered here today can take credit for either our existence or our salvation. Both are gracious gifts of God bestowed upon us by His mercy and for which we rejoice and give thanks each and every day.

Together with Kirk, we have all been freed from our slavery to the things of this world and those things which lead only to death so that instead we may now present our whole body, soul, and mind as slaves to Christ, the Master who laid down His life for His slaves. Now all that we have and are can be spent doing the right things for the right reason - to bring glory to the name of God who saved us and serve our neighbor; to do good because it is from God and is good. The life we no live in the flesh we live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us. We can have the absolute certainty that we will have our daily bread every day even though we walk in this wilderness stalked by the devil and surrounded by the wickedness of this world. Only let us not wander away from Christ and try to make it on our own. We will faint and die unless we are with Him to receive the food that He gives. We will be overcome by jackals and hyenas that lie in wait for us. We will enslave ourselves again to those things which cannot help us and lead only to death. But when we, like the thousands who were so hungry for the word of Christ that they followed Him for three days without giving

a thought to bringing along basic provisions, give our attention first to the righteousness of God which He freely bestows upon us in His Word, then we can rest in the assurance that He who multiplied the loaves and the fish in the wilderness, will most certainly give us all that we need to support this body and life.

God grant that we are kept ever mindful that God Himself is our life and our highest good so that our hearts aren't filled with either greed or fear. Instead, may our hearts be fixed where true joys may be found, namely, in Jesus Christ our Lord.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

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