

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

Are you thirsty, are you hungry? Is the situation in this world, in this city, in your daily life causing you distress, leading you to feel unfulfilled and less than satisfied with life and its challenges, searching for something more from a God who claims to be close by, who promises to deliver us?

Boy, do I have good news for you today!

Pray

All our readings today point to our God and Father, and his Son Jesus Christ, **feeding** us lavishly, and in various ways.

Let's start with the Old Testament reading from Isaiah who speaks to the people before they go into exile, with words of comfort when they are in exile. These words of comfort are to remind the people of Israel, God's chosen people, that even though they are enslaved by another nation that God will sustain them and that their own work to sustain themselves is of little use compared to what God has to offer them. He says:

"Come, everyone who thirsts,  
come to the waters;  
and he who has no money,  
come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
without money and without price.  
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,  
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?  
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,  
and delight yourselves in rich food.  
Incline your ear, and come to me;  
hear, that your soul may live;  
and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,  
my steadfast, sure love for David. Isaiah 55:1-3 (ESV)

What God has to give to the wilting Israelites is food and drink, a lavish feast, that will not cost them a cent. It is not earned or paid for, it is given and free. It fills the heart with good things and satisfies all their longings. It gives life to their souls, their ailing, failing souls that thought they could find satisfaction in the things of this world and now realize that the things of this world are empty hollow promises. Souls that sought after false gods, only to reap the empty benefits of idolatry, that are now searching for real sustenance. The thing that feeds these Israelites is the promise of the Saviour to come, that is realized in Jesus.

When God cut off his chosen people and sent them into exile it was so that they would turn from their idolatry, and even before the exile came to fruition, he provided the comfort they would need. What about us? Should we see the state of this world as a wakeup call, are there sins of idolatry that we justified, rationalized, ignored because we just had it too easy? Is the sin we daily encounter a reminder to us that we should not work for that which is not bread and labour for what does not satisfy? Is God calling us back to him, to his abundant

word and promises so that he can sustain us in our dependence on him rather than our unsustainable independence from him?

After all he continues to make promises along these lines. In our psalm today he says;

<sup>14</sup> The Lord upholds all who are falling  
and raises up all who are bowed down.

<sup>15</sup> The eyes of all look to you,  
and you give them their food in due season.

<sup>16</sup> You open your hand;  
you satisfy the desire of every living thing. Psalm 145:14–16 (ESV)

God has so much he wants to give us, he wants to satisfy the desires of every living thing. He wants us to be full to overflowing with his gifts.

We could look at this as gifts of creation, and it is. He feeds even the wild animals, and we are of much more importance to him than those. Our wealth, our food, our ability to produce and provide food is all a gift from God. We are thinking of the first article of the creed here, *“I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.”*

What does this mean?

Answer: I believe that God has created me and all that exists; that he has given me and still sustains my body and soul, all my limbs and senses, my reason and all the faculties of my mind, together with food and clothing, house and home, family and property; that he provides me daily and abundantly with all the necessities of life, protects me from all danger, and preserves me from all evil. All this he does out of his pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness on my part. For all of this I am bound to thank, praise, serve, and obey him. This is most certainly true.

Yet the things he offers and lavishly bestows on us are greater even than physical gifts.

In all the readings there is a mark of God’s compassion. The heading of the Isaiah reading says this much, ‘The compassion of the Lord’. The psalm reminds us:

<sup>8</sup> The Lord is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

<sup>9</sup> The Lord is good to all,  
and his mercy is over all that he has made. Psalm 145:8–9 (ESV)

Even Paul has compassion on the Jewish nation who should possess Christ because he belongs to them, yet they fail to see Jesus for who he really is. And Jesus, Jesus is full of compassion. When he desires some time to himself to contemplate and mourn the loss of his cousin John he is swamped by crowds. Knowing that only he has what they need he had compassion on them. Firstly he healed their diseases. He gave them something that no one else could give. He not only saw their miserable physical estate, and healed these effects of human sin when he heals, he also forgives and drives out the demonic. There are both physical and spiritual miracles displayed in this narrative.

As it draws later into the day, he gave them even more. The disciples think the people should be sent away to buy their own food, but Jesus gives them a feast to remember. Because he has compassion on them, he multiplies what appears to us and the disciples to be a measly meal so that all the hungry souls can eat. The list of miracles that day must have been long, yet Jesus shows that he is God, by taking control of this physical world and bending it to his whims. Healing the sick, feeding the hungry, sustaining the souls of all those people because he had compassion on them. He cared for them, he was gracious and merciful as God promises to be.

The connection to the sacramental meal Jesus provided for us cannot be missed. A commentator I listened to regarding this text said that the feeding of the 5000 looks back to the miracle meals of the Old Testament, (think manna, Elisha the prophet), but it also looks forward to the miracle meal of the New Testament. The one that our Lord gave us on the night he was betrayed. What a joy it is to receive this gift, this manna from above, this life-giving sacrament.

We should always desire the sacrament and all that it gives us, we should not despise it. We should hunger for it and be ready to run and get it when it is available. For some of us, not having the body and blood of Christ is a very heavy burden, it makes us feel distant from God and possibly causes us to question our salvation. Here I want to remind you of the readings today, and over the past few weeks where we have been told it is the Word that does God's work. It is the Word that creates and sustains faith. It is God's Word that upholds those who are falling, it is his Word that brings him near, it is his Word that delivers his mercy and steadfast love. It is even the Word that gives the sacraments their power for without the Word of God this is just bread and wine, and only plain water in the font. As we learn in the small catechism;

How can water produce such great effects?

Answer: It is not the water that produces these effects, but the Word of God connected with the water, and our faith which relies on the Word of God connected with the water. For without the Word of God the water is merely water and no Baptism. But when connected with the Word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Spirit.

It is the same for the Lord's Supper, it is the Word that makes it effective and powerful for life and salvation.

We have his Word; it has not left us. We are in the privileged position of having his Word read and proclaimed into our ears when we are present on a Sunday morning, maybe even into our homes via technology. God calls us to drink deeply of the Word and let it fill our hearts and souls especially when they are ailing so that we are full to the brim with his sustenance. So that we join with every living thing in being satisfied with his nourishment.

Be assured God is not withholding his forgiveness from us, it is readily and freely available. The same forgiveness that Jesus won on the cross for us and poured out on us in our baptism is still proclaimed in the absolution, it is available in his Word and as we remember

and live in our baptism. If you feel that you are going to miss out on the sacrament, miss God's salvation over these coming weeks, his Word is still available to you. You can read it, pray it, consume it, be filled a satisfied with the gifts God gives you in the Word.

Before I finish, I want to pick up on one final point. In the Gospel narrative the disciples think the people should be sent away to be fed. Jesus commands them, 'you give them something to eat!' But they don't think their supply is adequate. In Paul's letter to the Romans, he laments that he would be willing to give up his own salvation so that his Jewish brothers might believe. The command of Christ still stands for us, we have his Word, and we have his physical provision. How often do we look at what we have and think that is not enough? We're too small in number, we're too old, we're too damaged by conflict, we're not financially viable, we don't have enough to give. These responses will not do. This is not how Jesus responds to hungry crowds, this is not the compassion that Jesus has on us. No, the compassion Jesus has on us is that he saves us even in our sin. He gives bread even when we think there is nothing left. He gives life where we see only death. He spreads his Word lavishly even on inhospitable soil. He spreads his Word even when he knows weeds are going to grow. We have him, he has us, we belong to him, he has had compassion on us and he calls us to spread him where he is needed. Maybe that is to spread him by physically feeding others, it certainly means we are called to spread him where he is spiritually needed. Christ has had great compassion on us, he has satisfied all our desires and given us abundant blessing. Like Paul we are called to compassion, even sacrifice of our earthly gifts to share his great compassion with this ailing world. God knows they need it.

Jesus had compassion on the people, and he is still having compassion on us, feeding us with his Word that is freely available, releasing us from our sins by his forgiveness and delivering us eternal life. He has delivered these to us by our baptism that is a constant reminder of his sustenance, and he has also delivered this to us in his body and blood and will again sustain us with that meal. Continue to come to your compassionate saviour and receive all the provisions he has for you!

Amen

The peace of God that surpasses all our understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus Amen.