
† I preach in God's name for God's people. Let my words be from God and for God's people. **Amen**

Good morning.

Last Sunday, we were reminded the price that this congregation paid for keeping the faith, and we heard our Lord's encouragement to continue:

"Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

Our culture deceives many, wooing and tricking many to believe that its sexual ethic is somehow more righteous than that of the Church. It has convinced many denominations and many people; but let it not captivate us. For following this ethic comes with the great risk of losing the inheritance of the Kingdom of God. And so, as our culture sways and ebbs and flows, let us remain steadfast instead in what our Lord has said. And what our Lord has said is rooted in his law, his Ten Commandments.

On Wednesday, we heard again about these Ten Commandments. The Pharisees were elevating their own traditions to the level of these Commandments; they had made the ritual of handwashing as morally good as the Commandments. And so, when they caught Jesus and his disciples not washing their hands before dinner, they pounced on their opportunity to catch him "in the wrong."

"The problem, of course, is that the Pharisees were accusing Jesus and his disciples not of bad hygiene, but of sin—that going against *their* tradition was sin. "To not wash hands was to sin." I think the ancient world was well aware that hygiene had consequences. But even though bad hygiene can kill the body, it cannot—as is the point here—kill the soul. But that's the very thing of which the Pharisees were accusing Jesus. As if to say, the souls of Jesus and his disciples were in danger of being killed—over hand washing."

Whether with handwashing or with returning the shopping cart, we tend to be like the Pharisees in elevating our own traditions—our earthly traditions—to the level of spiritual and moral law. "We prioritize avoiding germs to avoid what can kill this body—which is important!—but we perhaps de-prioritize what may kill the soul—the persistent, unrepentant, breaking of the Ten Commandments."

"And yet, this is what the Pharisees and the priests had been doing all along—willfully breaking the commandment to honor one's father and mother—and teaching the people to do the same!"

Let us not base our righteousness on our own traditions or on our culture, but on Christ himself, who through his own life, demonstrated the purpose and good of the commandments, which is to love God well, and love one another well.

This morning we see the beautiful example of our Lord Jesus loving his people well. In fact, when we look closely, we can him providing for his people both in the *Manna* passage from Exodus and in the *Feeding of the 5000* passage from John. And when we look even closer, we see in the *Feeding of the 5000* the answering of the Lord's Prayer and the fulfillment of Psalm 23—that Good Shepherd Psalm we tend to know almost by heart.

We see, in the Feeding of the 5000, a *literal* fulfillment of both Psalm 23 and of our petition for daily bread in the Lord's Prayer. Borrowing from Mark's Gospel:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

"When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. (Mark 6:34, ESV)

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

[10] Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. (John 6:10, ESV)

Give us this day our daily bread.

Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted.

If you’re wondering how I’m going to turn this fulfillment of Psalm 23 and of the Lord’s Prayer into a sermon about fasting, you are wondering the right question. Whereas thus far into Lent, all our passages have lent themselves to fasting from food, or from pride, or from desire, this Sunday is different. It is all about God’s provision for his people.

This Sunday—the fourth Sunday in Lent—is meant to be a reprieve from fasting. Its Latin name, *Laetare*, brings a meaning of both “a reprieve” and “rejoice.” Put together, this is a respite, a time to catch our breath, a time to rejoice in the good that God has given us.

Still, fasting is unmistakably present. What do I mean? Where is this fasting? There’s no feeding this crowd of 5000 men without them first being hungry. And that means, quite simply, that they had missed a meal or two.

The crowd was there because of the sick, because of the signs they saw Jesus doing. And the crowd stayed until it was evening, until the day was almost over, and now there was nowhere else for them to go.

Turn briefly to our Exodus passage. It’s where God provides manna and quail to his people. Recall why the people of Israel are in the wilderness—they had been delivered from slavery.

The labor and the suffering of Israel in Egypt was enormous—and by the time of Moses, it was worse. Petitioning for their freedom made things hopeless; in addition to their extraordinary labor, they now had to gather the straw to make their quota of bricks.

We know the rest of this story. God sent Moses and the Ten Plagues, and the very last one—the Death of the Firstborn—finally freed his people.

And so, this people who knew slavery, who knew labor, now found themselves in the wilderness knowing nothing but hunger. Their memories taunted them—tricking them that somehow slavery with meat and bread was better than deliverance by the Lord in the wilderness—because of hunger.

We come at last to the point of fasting. Fasting forces this question—what do we hunger for? Salvation? Or *anything else?* The people of Israel had longed for freedom, and yet, now they began to be ruled by their own stomachs. Would they hunger for God—or merely food?

Turn now to our familiar Gospel reading. Jesus feeds the 5000 men. And, as John relates, the simple presence of the boy with the loaves and fishes tells us that there were many more there than just men. By the end of the passage, we see that all were fed, and that there were twelve baskets leftover.

The Son of God feeds his people. It is, I think, nearly as straightforward as this. And so, we reflect: When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, when we pray Psalm 23, when we hear God poured out manna from heaven for the wilderness generation, when we hear that Jesus multiplied loaves and fish....Do we trust that God provides for his people, for us? Or, do we still want him to provide what we crave and on our terms and on our timeline? What do we hunger for?

We don’t fast just for the sake of fasting. We don’t fast to deprive ourselves of some good. We fast—again, whether from shopping, scrolling, sweets, something else—for the purpose of directing our desires, comforts, and pleasures upon the One who is worthy of all such things—our Lord Jesus.

Nor should we forget that our Lord Jesus already knows what it means to be hungry. He fasted for forty days and nights. He has fasted since then. And now, here on the mountain, he is hungry too. And it is, perhaps, his own hunger that causes him to recognize the crowd's hunger, that begins this miracle of multiplication.

Jesus solicits help from his disciples. He asks them to problem solve. First they turn to money, then to what is available. How often is this our first thought, too? And how often do we find that money is an inadequate solution?

The disciples suppose that 200 denarii worth of money won't do, and neither will these few loaves and fish that the boy has.

We see by the end of this, that whatever bread might have been bought with 200 denarii—about 55% of a laborer's annual salary—would have been plenty. That's because any amount of bread was plenty, for the bread was going to be multiplied.

Why two fish and five loaves? The obviously true answer is because that is what the boy had. But to layer on that, two and five make seven, the number of creation; and five minus two make three, the number of salvation. Perhaps that is there.

I'm not sure the significance of the fish, other than that they are near a sea, and many of his disciples were fisherman, and that they were now in the business of catching men instead of fish—this is, more than anything else, probably the reason for the emphasis of how many men are present: there are five thousand men to be caught.

But bread is another story—there are layers upon layers of bread stores in the Old Testament. The most significant one is *manna* from heaven, the one we heard in our Exodus passage. But there is also the bread and wine Melchizedek brought to share with Abram; there is also the grain and wine that Boaz offers to Ruth; there is also the unleavened bread of the Passover.

And that brings us back to the Exodus, back to manna, back to the unleavened bread of the Passover, back to deliverance through the 10th and Final Plague, and right here to the Eucharist.

The Good Shepherd fed his sheep. It is the same thing that he instructs Peter to do: feed my sheep. It is therefore no surprise then that we see Peter doing exactly this in our epistle — feeding the 3000 in the breaking of the bread from our passage in Acts.

Jesus took bread, gave thanks, and broke it. This bread of Holy Communion is our manna from heaven; Christ Himself is our Passover meal.

Our Lord has been in the business of providing daily bread since the man and woman were first placed in that luxurious garden of Eden; our Lord plans to continue providing such daily bread in that Garden-Heaven still to come.

Is our appetite—our hunger—for Holy Communion, for God's Word, for worshipping our Lord, for God himself?

This Sunday is a reminder that the Lord's Supper—the Eucharist—is the bread and wine for which we give thanks, and in which we delight—the very body and blood of our Lord Jesus, who feeds us and fills us in faith.

Christ the Lord is worthy of all worship and praise and glory and honor and majesty, now and forever. **Amen and amen.**