

Seventh Sunday After Trinity, A²D, 2008

Mark 8:1-9 In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, ²"I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. ³And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away." ⁴And his disciples answered him, "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?" ⁵And he asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." ⁶And he directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd. ⁷And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them. ⁸And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. ⁹And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away.

In the name of the Father and of the ² Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 In the beginning there was life, the Life of the World, God Himself, who gave of Himself and created a world of life. The crown of creation was the man the Lord formed from the dust of the ground, into whom he breathed the breath of life and the woman he created from the flesh of Adam. He gave them life and entrusted to them the task of giving more life: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over all life." The garden teemed with life: the sky was filled with birds, the waters filled with fish, and the land filled with animals and plants and every creeping thing that creeps on the ground. And the Lord beheld all He had created, the life that flowed from Himself, and He pronounced it "very good."

2 Even the earth yielded food freely. The man and the woman ate the bread the ground yielded without any sweat from their brows, without any blood from their hands. But the bread of life and the fruit from the tree of life, completely satisfying though they were, were not enough for the man and the woman. Instead of the food that gave life, the food designed to sustain them for eternity, they chose the food that gave death. The rebellion of Adam and Eve in the garden, their attempt to choose for themselves good and evil without regard for the Lord's declaration of good and evil, their desire to place themselves in the place of God, was the choice of death. The wages of sin is death. Their sin brought death to themselves and death to all their descendents. They despised the Lord of Life, the Author of their Lives, and chose for themselves death.

3 In their choice, all creation felt the consequences of sin. The Garden that once teemed with life now reeked of death. The earth still yielded bread, but not like it used to. Now, the bread would only come at the expense of sweat, blood, and sometimes human lives. And the bread the ground would yield couldn't stave off the inevitable: death. In fact, the bread itself was death, proof of the only reality Adam and Eve and all their descendents would ever know.

4 Hunger, once a sign of the Lord's provision for His creation, once a desire that led the man and the woman to the Tree of Life, now is a warning of death. You hunger because you're dying. Your body tells you that you need food in order to survive, to make it to the next day. And you suppose that because your body is hungry, you must feed it. Hunger, once a good desire, has now been twisted by the servant of death, the serpent in the Garden. Your hunger for bread, which is good, turns into gluttony, which are evil. Your hunger for a spouse, which is good, turns into lust and adultery, which is evil. Your hunger for loving dominion over creation, which is good, turns into pride and exploitative hunger for power, which is evil. Your hunger for provision from the Lord, which is good, turns into greed for goods, which is evil. So repent of feeding every evil hunger your body feels. Repent of quarrelling and fighting over the bread which only brings death. Repent Of calling good your hunger for things which are evil. Blessed are those, after all, who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

5 The crowds who followed Jesus into the wilderness, who listened to Him with rapt attention for three days, hungered and thirsted for the righteous Word of God. But their seeking after the Word of God left them physically hungry and in danger of death. So Jesus had compassion on them. He saw their hunger, and, having fasted for forty days in the desert, He knew what hunger was. So, just as He did for the crowd of five thousand, not even two chapters earlier in the Gospel according to St. Mark, barely four months ago in the Church Year, Jesus gathered what was available. This time He took seven loaves and a few fish. From these He fed the four thousand until they were full, leaving seven baskets full of leftovers. Jesus demonstrated that He is the Author of Life, God in the Flesh, by giving life to these four thousand.

6 This crowd, fed by miraculous bread and fish, fed by the teaching of the Word of God in the Flesh, would nevertheless grow dissatisfied with their Bread King. When the bread ran out while their hunger increased, they would be the crowd who joined in the cheers of "Crucify Him." But, even while feeding them, while curing their hunger, Jesus knew this. Even while providing for your bodily needs, the Lord knows of your rebellious nature. He gives bread to the righteous and to the wicked. And while you were still sinful, still rebellious, still deserving nothing but the wage for your sin—death, Jesus Christ died for you. While He could not help but have compassion on the crowd in their time of hunger, while He cannot but help have compassion on you in times of physical hunger, this Lord came to do more than provide you with more of the bread of death.

7 This miracle of bread is not the end. Even St. Mark's language points to something greater. Jesus "took the loaves, and having given thanks, He broke them and gave them to the disciples." Recognize that language? St. Mark knows this miracle of Jesus points to an even greater miracle: the Lord's Supper. While He fed the crowds with more of the bread of death, He feeds His children with the Bread of Life, His own flesh and blood, earned with the sweat of His brow and the blood of His hands and side. This is the beautiful poetry of the Lord as He undoes the curse of death and the brokenness of the world. Sin entered the world through the woman Eve who first ate the fruit of death, but the One to bear all of humanity's sin entered the world through the woman Mary. While the devil conquered humanity and enslaved it to sin through the tree in the garden, the Lord conquered the devil and set humanity free from sin through the tree of the cross.

8 And now the Lord's great reversal continues. From the bread of death—wheat planted in the ground, harvested with toil, ground into flour, baked in hot ovens, purchased with the offerings from your own toils and labor, purchased with the sweat of your brow, the bread of death which we offer in our tithes and offerings—God returns to us the Bread of Life. That's why we bring our offerings forward immediately before the Lord's Supper. From these your offerings we purchase the altar bread that the Lord uses to deliver the very Bread of Life, the Body of Jesus. He undoes the curse and feeds you with the life-giving Body and Blood of Christ. As the Lord promises, "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh abides in me and I in him." (Jn 6:54-56)

9 Death, the wages of sin, is all around. All your toil can do nothing to stave off the consequence of Adam's sin and your sin. But here, in His Holy Meal, the Author of Life gives you a taste of eternal life. The forgiveness He won for you on the cross He here delivers to you in His own Body and Blood. Here, your hunger for righteousness is satisfied as you are given the righteousness of Him who bore your sinfulness on the cross.

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
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This sermon is indebted to Pr. Curtis for ideas contained therein.