

Something from Nothing

John 6:1-15 After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. ² And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. ³ Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. ⁵ Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹ "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?" 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. ¹¹ 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. ¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." ¹³ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" ¹⁵ Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

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

1 Fair question. Jesus asked Philip in order to test him, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" A denarius was a day's wage, so 200 denarii was about two-thirds of an annual salary, maybe \$20,000. "We don't have the money to buy even a bite for each person," Philip responded. "And even if we did, there's not enough food nearby to supply such a great need." So Andrew offered an answer, albeit equally hopeless: "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish," but for so many people, they are nothing.

2 The Israelites wandering in the wilderness on their way to the promised land of Canaan had a similar concern. "We used to have pots of meat and baskets of bread in Egypt. There we could eat until we were full without worrying about starving the next day. Even in slavery, we were better fed than we are now. What are we going to eat out here in the wilderness? We have nothing." But the Lord heard their complaints, their grumbling and had mercy on them. "At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God." In the evening, the camp was filled with quail, and in the

morning, the ground was covered with the bread of manna from heaven. The Lord provided for His people, creating food where there was none, creating something from nothing.

3 The Lord who provided for His people in the wilderness later provided for His people in the wilderness on the other side of Galilee. Philip and Andrew were right in their answers, but wrong for their despair. No amount of money could provide for these people. And the meager amount of food from this little boy was as nothing to such a great crowd. But the Lord provided for His people by feeding these people until they were full. They ate as much bread as they wanted and as much fish as they could handle. When the disciples gathered the leftovers, twelve enormous baskets could barely contain all the fragments left over. The people, having had their bodies cared for, having had their hunger filled, rejoiced, saying, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world."

4 But their satisfaction didn't last long. If you keep reading in John's Gospel, you'll discover what happened in the second half of chapter six. The crowd got into boats and followed him to Capernaum. There, they asked Him for a sign: "What sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus, unless you can provide bread for us miraculously like the Lord did for our fathers in the wilderness, we won't believe you. Same crowd who was fed with bread and fish now said they would not believe unless they were fed. And the Israelites who were fed with manna and quail would return to their grumbling.

5 Even when the Lord creates something from nothing, your tendency is to move from something back to nothing. Even when the Lord has promised to provide daily bread for all people, even for all evil people, you fret and fear that days will be breadless. While the Lord has proved Himself faithful in providing everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, you suppose that you can better provide for your own body. You are hungry, so you feed yourself with toys and trinkets. You try to satisfy your hunger with fantasy thoughts, with reality

television, with more activities to keep you busy and distracted. All these things are nothing.

Repent.

6 He who provided bread in the wilderness, who creates something from nothing, He is the One who, as Paul records the hymn in his letter to the Philippians, made himself nothing. He was God, yet set aside all the power and privilege of His divinity and joined Himself to human flesh, made himself nothing. This Jesus Christ made Himself as nothing so that He could die on the cross, rejected by God, beaten by men, nothing in the eyes of the world, bearing the weight of your sin. This He did for you. You who because of your sin were nothing, spiritually dead, are made something.

7 The Lord who makes something from nothing does precisely this for you. He made Himself nothing, was crucified, so that you might be made something from nothing. Water is nothing, but through the waters of Holy Baptism, the Lord created faith from nothing. Though your heart by its nature seeks satisfaction in things that are nothing, the Lord satisfied you with something, with faith. Through these waters, the Lord gives life where there was only death. Likewise, a word by itself is nothing, but through the proclamation of the Holy Gospel, as through the waters of Baptism, the Lord creates something from nothing. Faith comes from hearing. The living, powerful, creative Word of God causes there to be something—faith—when there was only nothing.

8 He who bespeaks you righteous continues to create something from nothing. Like the boy's humble barley loaves and small pickled fish, here is bread and wine. These are nothing. But from nothing, God creates the very presence of Jesus in and with bread and wine. Something from nothing. This something is life-giving; the very body and blood of Jesus for you to eat and drink is for the forgiveness of your sins. Those who ate manna and quail in the wilderness and those who ate barley bread and fish on the shores of Galilee never ate and drank anything like this. Here is your Lord's very real body and blood for you for the forgiveness of your sins.

9 The same Lord who here meets your deepest need, who satisfies your basic hunger to have your sins forgiven and to be placed into a restored relationship with your Creator, He has promised to take care of your bodily needs as well. Today is Laetare, a day of joy in the midst of repentance. Flowers make a brief return, and the Introit gives the song of our everyday life: rejoice. Along the journey from the Font to the day of our Lord's return, He provides for us in the wilderness. Every day is like Laetare, joy in the midst of repentance. And all the while, the Lord takes care of you. You needn't worry about what you will wear or what you will eat from day to day. He who takes care of your most pressing needs, your spiritual care, will He not also care for the needs of your body? Indeed, He will.

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

Soli Deo Gloria

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