**Mark 6:30-44**

The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. **31** And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. **32**  And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. **33** Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. **34** 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. **35** And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. **36**  Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” **37** But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.” And they said to him, “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?” **38** And he said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” And when they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” **39** Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. **40** So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. **41** And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. **42** And they all ate and were satisfied. **43** And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. **44** And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

**“Filled & Fulfilled”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Plenty of people say it, but what do we mean when we say, “God provides?” Is it about earthly things like what we need for the here and now? Is it about heavenly things like forgiveness and eternal salvation? Which is more important the earthly or heavenly? Too often, what belongs together in life goes out of balance and turns against each other. Rather than trying to make the material stuff of life most important or attempting to be spiritual as if life has no physical concerns. There is a better way to handle what the Psalmist celebrates about God, “You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.”

The desire is for us to keep that balance of what God provides for body and soul. Our only way to do this is we need to look to Jesus and Him crucified for sinners. Eternal blessings and temporal blessings find there source and balance in Him. It would be wrong to become entranced with the things of this world as if they last or can be worshiped. It would also be wrong to become detached from this world as if our daily callings and issues do not matter. In Christ, we have the answer of why God cares for life at the present, but also how His love extends to give eternal life that has no end. Jesus out of compassion gathers His sheep to fill and fulfill all we need for body and soul.

The feeding of the five thousand is a remarkable event and we find it in all four Gospel accounts. Most people when talking about miracles of Jesus most likely remember this one. It proves how Jesus never tires to fill us with good things. Before jumping right to unexpected feast, we first turn to His apostles. The compassion of Jesus already saw the weariness of His servants. Having returned from preaching and healing in His Name they heard Him say, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.”

Weariness comes upon our lives as well. Yet, it is doubly true for those called out of darkness by baptism. Christians get little relief in this life. On one side, we have the Devil, the world, and our sinful nature trying to wear us down. On the other side, we have the responsibility to witness the Gospel, “…for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). Plenty seek after a life of leisure, but that answer on its own ends in sadness. Jesus tells us by Word and Sacrament to come with Him and rest a while.

No sooner, did the apostles get some rest then the crowds came upon them. The sight arriving at that shoreline must have been exhausting and maybe even annoying. However, when (Jesus) went ashore, “…he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things” (Mark 6:34). Jesus is never too busy, too tired, or too overwhelmed for anyone. They wanted miracles, but He saw their true need. There was no true shepherd, which meant only death and false doctrine. Herod proved how little he cared by killing God’s prophet John the Baptizer. The Pharisees and Sadducees were in it for their own benefit and not even with the crowd. Rulers and authorities on their own accord do not have the answer.

The greatest compassion of God is to fill us with His Word. It is why Christ, the Word become flesh, directed His disciples after His resurrection to go and baptize all nations, “…teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). The Church is to call shepherds that will have compassion to teach what God says. Peace and deliverance in this world comes in different ways, but it is short-lived. God seeks to send shepherds that will tend His sheep to have lives, “…built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone…” Only the Word carries the weight of good news with compassion that alone stands to save sinners.

Finally, where the disciples wanted to scatter the crowds to go eat, Jesus had other plans. In that desolate place, the Good shepherd went out of the way to care for even the most basic needs. While the disciples wanted to wash their hands of it. Jesus jumped right in asking the most embarrassing question. “How many loaves do you have?” It was not enough nor could it ever be. With such simple gifts they had on hand, Jesus made it into a feast. His compassion came with abundance that even answered the bodily needs in life. Here was a green pasture fit for the sheep that had followed Him.

Food is one of the most basic needs we have in life for our bodies. It is not a mistake then how Jesus tied His abundant sacrifice to a meal. The manner of how He fed the five thousand sounds similar to what He did on the night He was betrayed. In this meal, we have the promise that the Lord’s compassion fills our needs for the physical and spiritual. Where Jesus gives forgiveness there is both strength for the body and salvation for the soul. The Lord’s Supper turns a desolate world into green pastures. It is our promise for the present along with the final assurance of resurrection and life that has no end.

Since Jesus fills us with all good things, He also fulfilled all that we need for life. Christ weariness by the cross proves His love for weary disciples. If you are worn out by sin, if death keeps drowning out life, if the devil seems to tirelessly attack. Look to Christ crucified. He had no place to rest His head and when He did, it was on the cross. St. Paul declares, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” His blood continues to pour forth throughout the generations. The weariness of Christ is God’s righteous branch that has fulfilled what sinners need by His sacrifice.

Jesus now looks upon each person with the purpose to save. Like the crowd, there is compassion without limit able to help any. His standard of love comes on terms not taught or known by men. Jesus told His disciples, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). This Word is what acts to bring relief to the broken. This Word is the answer to the distressed and suffering. This Word is Christ the true shepherd who will not abandon His sheep. His compassion has fulfilled the deepest love for He bound it all to the cross.

Jesus at last provides a feast of victory that has no end. He tells us to bring what we have for Him to use in this world. Whatever we give seems small, limited, and maybe even useless. It needs to be this way so the situation is beyond saving, beyond works, beyond what we see. In such desolation, we know Jesus does great things. By now taking, blessing, and breaking us He makes witnesses to benefit and save others. His feast promises all is fulfilled and we proclaim His death until He comes. There is enough Jesus to go around, enough forgiveness, and enough compassion. Jesus gathers His sheep to fill and fulfill all we need for body and soul. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.