

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Thanksgiving

November 25, 2021

Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl

Jesus feeds us.

In those days, when there was again a large crowd and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples and said to them, ²“I feel compassion for the crowd because they have already stayed with me three days and do not have anything to eat. ³If I send them home hungry; they will faint on the way. Some of them have come from a long distance.”

⁴His disciples replied, “Where can anyone get enough bread to feed these people here in this deserted place?”

⁵He asked them, “How many loaves do you have?”

“Seven,” they said.

⁶He commanded the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves, gave thanks, and broke them. He gave the pieces to his disciples to distribute to the crowd, and they did so. ⁷They also had a few small fish. He blessed them and said that these should be distributed as well. ⁸The people ate and were satisfied. They picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ⁹About four thousand men were there. Then he sent them away. ¹⁰Right after that, Jesus got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

—Mark 8:1-10

My fellow family members of our God,

In our Wednesday morning Bible study, we are looking at a book entitled “Connecting Sinai to Calvary” by John Jeske. In our lesson for today (yesterday) we read a very applicable section which I would like to read for you.

In a conversation at his dinner table, Martin Luther once made the remark: “If Adam were to return to earth and see the way we live and the food we eat, he would say: ‘This is not the world I lived in!’” King Solomon in all his glory never had a chariot like the one parked in your garage. He never knew what a treat frozen orange juice is. Even our brief review of the way God’s people lived and ate in ancient Israel must convince us that compared with theirs our standard of living consists of undreamed-of wealth. It’s been said that American garbage disposals eat better than most of the world’s population.

Satan knows that too. His goal in our lives, as was his goal in the lives of ancient Israelites, is to rob us of our thankfulness for God’s good gifts. If it were within Satan’s power, he wouldn’t let us have a single piece of bread, not a single penny of income, not even a single hour of life. But since that’s not in his power, he’ll try to rob us of God’s blessings by making us ungrateful and unappreciative of them.

As we live our day-to-day lives, how important it is to listen for our Father’s voice saying: “My child, I love you! My child, I will provide you with everything I know you need! My child, nothing in all creation can separate you from my love in Christ Jesus!”

Like the ancient Israelites, you have a God who has obligated himself by making a covenant with you. That means you have a God you can count on. The ancient Israelites forgot that. Don’t you forget that, dear Christian. Today is your day to give God your personal, individual thanks.

Those are good words for us to hear on this Thanksgiving celebration, aren’t they? Do we realize how blessed we really are? Do we recognize the gracious hand of our God who pours out blessing and bounty in our lives? Do we see our loving God standing with his hands open behind each and every blessing of our lives? Test yourself: what flows off of our lips more readily? Thanksgiving and praise or grumbling and complaining?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor who lived in Germany approximately 100 years ago, once said, “It is only with *gratitude* that life becomes rich!” Isn’t that true? I can be the poorest person in the world, but if I have gratitude in my heart, my life becomes rich. Well, what is gratitude?

Wikipedia has this definition of “gratitude”: “Gratitude is a feeling of appreciation felt by the recipient of kindness, gifts, help, favors, or other types of generosity, towards the giver of such gifts.” Did you catch that last part? “Towards the giver of such gifts.”

In order to have gratitude, a person needs someone else to be grateful towards. Martin Luther referred to gratitude as “the basic Christian attitude.” Instead of simply being a sentimental feeling, gratitude in the life of a Christian is regarded as a virtue that shapes not only emotions and thoughts but also actions and deeds. When we focus our eyes on the Lord of all and see everything that he has done and is doing for us, our hearts erupt with gratitude to our God. We have the greatest reason to always have gratitude because we have the greatest Giver: our Lord Jesus Christ.

Just look at how giving Jesus is in our lives. Just look at how Jesus takes care of us. He takes care of us, both according to our bodies, and according to our souls. He takes care of our body and our earthly life mostly through the institutions of creation. He sees to it that the crops grow, that there are animals, including turkeys, to eat. He makes sure that the trucks

have drivers to drive the produce to the grocery stores. He puts people in place to stock the shelves so that you can buy your food. All of this is from that hand of our gracious and giving God. He has instituted the family and the state to produce and protect life. He uses parents to make sure that food is on the table. He uses laws to protect our selling and purchase of goods. All of that is from the gracious hand of our God who takes care of us.

And Jesus takes care of our souls too. You are here today. We gather regularly in this place of worship. And Jesus takes care of our souls through the preaching of his Word and the giving of his sacraments. Through these, the Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith. He gives out the forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation.

Now, in our text for today, it is evident that Jesus certainly takes care of the body. He looked out at the crowd that was with him, and he had compassion for the people. He was concerned for people, and his compassion went into action as he takes care of people. 4000 people were with Jesus in the wilderness. It had been three days, and the people had not eaten anything. He was concerned for them. He wanted to help them. But before we get into this miracle, ask yourself what this huge crowd of people was doing with Jesus in the wilderness with no food?

What would be so important to these people that they didn't think to pack enough food for a journey in the wilderness? No doubt they were listening to Jesus and his preaching and teaching. They were the ones who have sought first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

There was a time when Jesus was with people on the side of a mount, and he gave a sermon. We call it the Sermon on the Mount. And Jesus talked about all the physical blessings our heavenly Father gives us. Jesus says, "Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink or what you will wear. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them, and he will take care of you." And he ends that section by saying, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things (all these physical things) will be given you as well" (Matthew 6) Those people in the wilderness with Jesus were doing that. They weren't first seeking for their physical welfare. They were seeking for their spiritual welfare. And that is always God's encouragement to us.

The Scriptures are always reminding us that the Lord's Word is our greatest treasure. It is our life, our salvation, and our joy. When the devil was tempting Jesus in the wilderness, he took a stone and told Jesus to turn it into bread. Jesus was hungry. He could have done it. But instead, he says, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Later, when Jesus had been teaching some difficult things, and most of the people had left, Jesus turns to the disciples and asks, "Are you also going to leave?" Peter responds, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the *words* of eternal life." The Lord's Word is our greatest treasure.

When the devil wants to kill and destroy, he always attacks the Word. His first temptation to Adam and Eve is really his only temptation, "Did God really say?" Because doubt in God's Word, doubt in his promises, doubt in his teachings, doubt in his commands, doubt in his Word, is death.

So, Jesus feeds us with his Word. Jesus gives us his teaching through his Word. Jesus has instituted, for our eternal life, the preaching of the Word. He has established his church, so that we would hear his Word. Jesus has given us his promises that he will provide for us and care for us. He has declared that he is always with us and will never abandon us.

And that is true both in the spiritual and the physical sense. Jesus not only feeds our souls, but he also feeds our bodies. This, in fact, is the point of the feeding of the 4000 with seven loaves of bread and a few fish. Jesus isn't just feeding the people with his teaching and preaching. His heart goes out to the people who had no food. He has a deep compassion to take care of the people physically, too.

And Jesus can do that. Jesus can take care of people. Jesus can take care of you. He has taught us to pray, "Give us today our daily bread," because he loves to hear that prayer and loves to answer it.

Luther, preaching on this text, says, "Never has it been seen or heard that a Christian died for want of bread." They might, says Luther, be thrown in prison, martyred, or put to death in some way, but they will not starve to death. I think, in the last 500 years since the time of Martin Luther, this is still true. Jesus will not let you starve to death. If he has to multiply seven loaves, if he has to rain bread from heaven, he will provide for you.

Oh, this does not mean that you might not have times of hunger and suffering. The 4000 in the wilderness went three days without any food. It might be that Jesus drags us through all sorts of trouble, hunger, sickness, sorrow, but he promises to be with us.

He will feed us. Oh, this also does not mean that Jesus will always give us whatever our heart desires. This is not a lavish meal that the people have in the wilderness, but it sustains them on their way to heaven. So, it is with you. You have this promise. Jesus will feed you. He will feed your eternal life with his words and promises, and he will feed your body, and give you your daily bread. And all of this is because he loves you. He says, "My child, I love you. My child, I will provide you with everything I know you need! My child, nothing in all creation can separate you from my love in Christ Jesus!"

This Thanksgiving weekend, you and I have the opportunity to pause and count all our blessings. So, my friends, what are those blessings for which you are thankful? Can you count them all? As you think about all those blessings, where does

God fit on that list? You see, a heart of gratitude always recognizes that all our blessings come from God. A heart of gratitude focuses on him in all circumstances of life. A heart of gratitude focuses on God who stands behind all your blessings with his hands wide open.

In his amazing compassion for us, Jesus feeds us. He feeds us spiritually, and he feeds us physically. Therefore, we live lives of gratitude. After all, "it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich." And with our God who feeds us and takes care of us, we have every reason to always have gratitude in our hearts and lives. Amen.