

Pastor Kenneth Mars

Christ the King & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Cody & Powell, WY

Laetare (Fourth Sunday in Lent)

March 10, 2024

Text: John 6:1–15

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The past few weeks have been a consistent reminder that not only is the world filled with the glory and grandeur of God's life, wisdom, and power. But the spiritual world, which is largely unseen to any form of human observation, is very real and exceedingly active. The Gospel readings for the past three Sundays haven't let us forget that the devil and his fallen angels are implacable enemies bent on destroying our faith in Jesus. We heard again that Satan tempted Jesus in the Judean desert in an attempt to destroy His work of saving the world. The past two Sundays, we've learned that demons not only tempt people to do evil things, they also oppress and possess some people.

The 4 gospels record a number of demonic possessions. In all those situations, the Lord Jesus casts them out by the power of His Word and actions. Thereby, we are reminded Jesus is the Lord and conqueror over the demonic realm. In Christ and through Christ, we have been redeemed from Satanic tyranny. The key idea, however, is that wonderful phrase, "in Christ." In Christ and in Christ alone, we are victorious. The battle against temptation, sin, vice, and unbelief still rages around us with incredible intensity. But in Christ, we stand triumphant by the wondrous grace of the Holy Spirit.

Today, the 4th Sunday in Lent, is somewhat of a respite in our Scriptural journey to Good Friday and Easter. You might find it refreshing that the gospel reading about Jesus feeding the 5,000 recorded in John 6 does not refer directly to the Satan or his fallen angels. But we mustn't be lulled into spiritual lethargy. John 6:1 says, "After this..." Before Jesus performed this great miracle, the Jews wanted to stone Jesus to death because 1) they believe He broke the Sabbath when He healed a man who had been an invalid for 38

years, and 2) for calling God His Father, thus making Himself equal to God. The devil was stealing away God's Word from their hearts as the Jews rejected Jesus in murderous unbelief. After Jesus fed the 5,000, a hot debate began about Jesus being the bread of life that comes down from heaven. In John 6:53, Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." Most were offended at this saying and stopped following Jesus.

I present this extensive context surrounding the feeding the 5,000 to demonstrate that spiritual warfare is always present. Even during times of relative calm, prayerful vigilance is the order of the day. Throughout the four gospels, Jesus teaches His disciples they must remain alert, watchful, and prepared for times of affliction and temptation. At the same time, we need not be afraid or anxious. The miracle of feeding the 5,000 gives testimony to the fact that Jesus is our Savior who not only overcomes the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh, but He also provides for our earthly needs.

Jesus never stops encouraging His disciples with words of assurance. We are in His loving hands. We abide in Him and He abides in us. So, the Christian life can be rightly described as prayerful vigilance and readiness mixed with calm assurance and joyful expectation. Temptations and afflictions are real and always close at hand. But even greater is the love of God we have in and through Christ. Nothing can separate us from God's perfect, redemptive love that gives peace, joy, courage, and all the gifts of the Spirit.

It is good that we have a respite in the midst of our Lenten journey. Those 5,000 disciples, not counting women and children, certainly needed our Lord's love and care. They were following Jesus because they saw the signs and wonders He was doing on the sick (vs. 2). It was good that they were coming to Jesus. Even as it's good we come to Jesus each week in worship to hear His word, strengthen ourselves through His body and blood, and sing our prayers, praises, and thanksgivings. It's good that we go to Jesus everyday in faith as we read the Bible at home, pray for one another, and sing our praises to Him in psalm and hymns. We go to Jesus because He bids us to

come to Him. “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matt. 11:28). The outstretched arms of Jesus are never withdrawn. In good times and bad. During joy or sorrow. In life or death. We go to Jesus.

As the crowd was following Jesus on the mountain that day, I suspect the disciples were a bit alarmed at the coming crisis. Jesus asked Philip where they were going to get enough food to feed all these people. We don’t have enough money to feed these people (vs. 7). Andrew pointed out the only food they have readily at hand is five barley loaves of bread and two fish. But, he asked with a ring of bitter resignation, “what are they for so many” (vs. 9)? The plain, blunt fact of the matter is: Jesus, we don’t have enough.

Don’t we make this conclusion all the time? We see the needs of our own personal lives, the needs of our congregation, the concerns in Cody/Powell, in our country and throughout the world and conclude, we don’t have enough. We compare the resources we have at hand and then look at the many, many needs surrounding us and say, “What are they for so many?” And that question really speaks the truth. In ourselves, according to our resources, our wisdom, strength, power and ability....we don’t have enough. That’s the blunt truth.

But such evaluations forget Jesus, the Lord of glory, the Savior of the world. Jesus took those meager provisions of bread and fish – the lunch of a single boy – and fed everyone. And there was more leftover at the end than there was at the beginning!

John, the gospel writer, describes what Jesus did using the language and actions we hear when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Obviously, Jesus isn’t instituting Lord’s Supper here. This is not the night in which He was betrayed. But John describes Jesus’ actions using Lord’s Supper-like language. Vs. 11, “Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated.” The parallel accounts of this miracle recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke are even more explicit. Jesus

took the bread, blessed it, broke it, gave it to the disciples, and they distributed it to the crowd in orderly arrangement. What was not enough became more than enough, in the hands of Jesus.

That bread and wine on the altar are insufficient to give us Christ's true body and blood, the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, fellowship with God and one another, and union with Christ Jesus. Bread and wine cannot do these things. But when Jesus takes them, blesses them, and gives them to us, they are more than enough to accomplish the blessed task He has in mind. This feeding miracle reminds us that we are never, never deficient in what we need for the life Jesus desires to give us in this world or the world to come. He takes what we have and who we are and blesses it for the purposes He has mind.

What we are to learn from this is that in Christ we are never lacking. Christ Jesus came to this earth, preached the Gospel of the kingdom, healed the afflicted, suffered on the cross, died and rose from the dead in order to provide all that you need in body and soul for a blessed life in Him. The needs are great! And we certainly can't do and provide all things to all people all the time. But what Christ has given us in our lives, in this congregation, and in His blessed Church throughout the world is more than enough. Because He makes it prosper. That's why we come to Him day by day, week after week, through the years and decades. In ourselves, we are woefully deficient and inadequate. But in Christ, we have superabundance.

May this blessing from Ephesians 3:20–21 remain with you always: “²⁰Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

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

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.