

Grace and peace to you my friends and fellow sojourners from Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

First contextual question. Did you see and understand what Isaiah is saying on behalf of God in the first sentence of our first reading today? Let me try to paraphrase it in this way: "Come to me **everyone** for that which **sustains** your life." Then Isaiah goes on to ask on behalf of God why we waste that which we have on things that are not important to our being. Why do we waste energy and time on worry? Think about the impact of that statement 3000 or so years ago and then think about what it also means to our lives and our society **today**. After all, we now have entire industries built to sell us things that make life easier but have absolutely **no** impact on the sustainability of our lives.

Second, contextual question. Did you hear, see, or understand any connection between the Isaiah text and the gospel text. There is the food connection, of course, but it is not just about food, it is about an outrageous, unimaginable **abundance**. In Isaiah this abundance opens the way for hearing the promise of, not only a renewed, but an everlasting covenant, an eternal covenant. Then in Jesus, that covenant is **expanded** to include not just the Israelites but us as well.

The prophet Isaiah's language about the everlasting covenant begins with images of sustenance **free** and abundant for **all**: water, milk, wine, bread. We should understand and believe that God's **outrageous**, nonsensical abundance is the center of the everlasting covenant, and that it spills out of **any** boundary we or anyone might try to place upon it. God's promise defies commodification. It flies against whatever **economic** system we might create or try to abide by. God's promise is not economic.

God's steadfast, sure love is not underwritten by notions of scarcity but works on the principle of abundance that cannot be contained. This, my friends, is new creation. This, my friends, is the exact opposite of how our culture, where our society expects and teaches us to live our lives in fear of scarcity.

Does this picture bring back a few memories? Do you remember hearing something to the effect that Lutherans coffee and food go hand-in-hand? Our readings today, at least the first and the gospel,

have food as a primary focal point. But before we delve into that a little more - I do want to consider the context of our gospel reading. You might recall from last week that Jesus has just heard about the beheading of Jesus' friend **and** relative, John the Baptist.

Understandably, Jesus is upset and so our reading today begins with Jesus getting in a boat and going off to a deserted place alone. This essentially means Jesus went into the wilderness, which is lonely, deserted, uninhabitable and desolate. Jesus went there because it is a good place to grieve, pray, fast, and repent. It is, after all, a **lonely** place but **God** is not **absent**. It can be a place of tremendous spiritual **intensity** because there are no distractions. In this case, however, the people Jesus departed from were not only able to see where Jesus was going but they were able to follow Jesus' journey on the shore. When Jesus finally **does** go ashore, there is a massive crowd of people there in **that** wilderness. Jesus once more is moved to compassion, even amidst grief, and begins to heal their sick.

As the evening begins to approach, the disciples become worried that the people have been in the heat and the sun of the wilderness all day most likely without **any** proper food and water and that Jesus should send them away so that they can care for themselves. Instead, Jesus tells the disciples to feed them and that is when the real fun begins.

Now there are several other key facts to know. First, the reading says there were about five thousand men plus women and children. Is that one woman and one child for each man? Probably not, yet we could easily be talking about 10,000 to 15,000 or more mouths to feed on five loaves and two fish. Second, this is not the only large group feeding Jesus did as there is also a feeding of 4,000 to come in a week or two. Third, this is actually the **only** miracle that is recorded in all **four** gospels.

The well-known preacher Charles Spurgeon once said: "Believers are not dependent on circumstances. Their joy comes not from what they have but from whose they are, not from what they enjoy but from what was suffered for them by their Lord." Now June is often the hottest month of the year in our area of Alaska. Fourteen months ago our son Joe had a mountain bike accident where he found himself in a

desolate and deserted place like the wilderness with two broken bones in each of his forearms. He could have laid there a long time in hope that he would be found by someone. Thank God, he had the knowledge **and** fortitude to get up and seek out the assistance he needed by walking about two miles. And thank God he did find a number of people willing and able to render him assistance. He is not 100% but he is able to do just about anything he wants to do which is not necessarily good for the hearts of his mother and I. Yet in some ways his **is** a miracle story.

So, what is the "miracle" in **this** story? Is it what Jesus did? Is it maybe what the disciples did or did not do? Is it the action and reaction of the people? Or as is often the case, may be it is the **combination** of all three. **We** have begun preparing for "God's work, our hands" Sunday which is September tenth. But the truth is that this is the calling of disciples **every** hour of every day. Karoline Lewis said Jesus had one pointed phrase: "**They need not go away; you give them something to eat.**" In other words, you do it. That, my friends, is our calling as believers, as disciples, doing it.

Hear then the good news:

Martin Luther said: "*The law of God and the will of man are two adversaries, that without the grace of God can never be reconciled.*"

Maybe Jesus' compassion was contagious in the crowd and they cared for each other.

Maybe Jesus' healing touch inspired them to gratitude for a simple meal abundant by wilderness standards.

Rod Rosenblatt said: "*Christianity is about a one-sided rescue, that we didn't want and certainly didn't deserve, and God did it anyway.*"

Do we have the knowledge of profound lack and also the experience of provision?

Do we see where we may exist in the meantime of life, but can we also see, albeit dimly, solutions?

Have we experienced when, where, and why we think we cannot go on, but **then** we do?

Do you understand discipleship is rarely tidy or convenient?

Sometimes what we are asked to live, and when, may just be a miracle itself.

C S Lewis said: "But the great thing to remember is that, though our feelings come and go, God's love for us does not. It is not wearied by our sins, or our indifference; and, therefore, it is quite relentless in its determination that we shall be cured of those sins, at whatever cost to us, at whatever cost to God."

Martin Luther also said: "These two words, grace and peace, include all that belong to Christianity. Grace releases sin, and peace makes the conscience quiet."

Grace and peace to you, my friends, from the God who has done for us **absolutely** everything.

Amen