

In Nomine Jesu

JESUS HAS COMPASSION

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The primary text for our meditation this morning is the Gospel according to Mark in the eighth chapter – also known as the feeding of the 4,000. Although the feeding miracles of Jesus are perhaps some of the most well-known narratives in the New Testament, especially popularized by children’s books, it is without question that the feeding of the 5,000 is the more recognized miracle, even among the biblically literate. In all four Gospels, the evangelists recount the time when Christ broke bread and distributed it to 5,000 men and thousands of women and children. So much bread was given that 12 baskets were gathered after the people had eaten their full.

Yet, only in Matthew and Mark’s Gospels is it recorded that Jesus once again broke bread, this time to feed a crowd of 4,000 men, and again, thousands of women and children. So much bread was given that this time seven baskets were gathered after the people had eaten their full. Perhaps then, it might be the case that some here have even forgotten that on two separate occasions Jesus fed the multitudes. After all, most people remember that Wilt Chamberlin dropped 100 points in one basketball game, but they often forget about the other time he scored 78. Basketball aside though, forgetfulness is a common vice among fallen sinners. The irony for us today then is that the text by itself, and in its wider context in the Gospel of Mark, works with the theme of forgetting.

First, the text opens with the forgetfulness of the crowd...

In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat."¹

¹ Mark 8:1-2

That the Evangelist wants us to take note of the crowd's predominately Gentile makeup is plainly evident in Mark's recounting. First, not 10 verses earlier Jesus said the following to the Gentile Syrophenician woman before He healed her daughter:

*Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.*²

Yet there, as Jesus did indeed heal the woman's daughter of her demon possession, we see that even the dogs eat the children's crumbs and are thus fed. And so, Christ will soon offer from the seven loaves, mere crumbs to 4,000 people, a feast which fills the hungry bellies of gentile dogs.

What is more, after healing the Syrophenician woman's daughter, Christ then traveled through the Gentile populated region of the Decapolis and healed a deaf-mute. Jesus Himself entered into the unclean Gentile places and there offered cleansing. Thus, our text reads,

*In those days...*³

In the days when Christ was offering the Gospel to the Gentiles, healing in both body and soul, a great crowd gathered in a desolate place with nothing to eat. This foolish gentile crowd journeyed from a great distance and made the critical error of long distance travel – they forgot that eventually you have to come back. So, enamored were they with the prospect of hearing and healing from Jesus that they did not remember the immediate need of their own bellies. What is more, not only did they forget food for the journey home, but they wandered into a place where none could be found. They left Albuquerque heading south toward Tucson with a quarter tank of gas and didn't have the foresight to think that there might not be a whole lot of places to fill up in the desert.

And so, the foolish crowd, because of their forgetfulness put themselves in a position where, as Jesus says,

*"If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way."*⁴

² Mark 7:27

³ Mark 8:1a

⁴ Mark 8:3

If the crowd leaves Jesus, without being given food to sustain them for the journey, they will die. As it was for the crowd, so it is for you that forgetfulness is damning. As it was for the Syrophenician woman and the deaf-mute, without the compassion of Jesus, you are doomed. Sinners need Christ's compassion because without it they will die in both body and soul. This is true for all because, as the devil, the world and our sinful nature constantly prove, we, like the crowd, are in a desolate place. Look no further than your own back yards to see that the goodness of creation evident in our reading from Genesis has been thoroughly corrupted. No longer does the food of the earth just **spring up pleasant to our sight** without the sweat of your face. Food takes hard work. Now, because of our one infectious sin, you must work the ground, and **in pain shall you eat of it all the days of your life**. Don't forget that, like the crowd, you are in a desolate place.

What is more, the desolation which you face does not pertain to mere food alone. No, as it was for Adam so it is for you, sin separates you from God. Though God created man in His image, to be in full communion with Him always, sin separated man from God. The temptation of the wily foe led Eve to forget the Words of the Lord. It led Adam to forget his calling as teacher of that same Word. It led to exile from the Garden. Forgetfulness is a common vice among sinners. With sin, death and the power of the devil looming, like the foolish crowd that forgot to bring food for the road, we so often forget to prepare before we leave our homes. Just a few taps of the snooze alarm and now you're too rushed for your morning prayers and devotions. Just a few more late night chores and time in the Word before bed is shortened or forgotten all-together. A mouth-watering meal means that you're five bites in before you remember to give thanks to God for His provisions, if you remember at all. Crisis at work or home means that you forget that the Lord clothes even the lilies of the valley and that much more will He provide for you. How often do you forget to examine yourself thoroughly before partaking of the Body and Blood of Jesus? Do not fool yourself, forgetfulness leads to fainting on the road... Lord, have compassion on us because the forgetfulness does not end there.

Now enter the disciples.

*His disciples answered Him, "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?"*⁵

Jesus just feed 5,000 men not two chapters ago! Forgetfulness then not only proceeds the providing of God, but it often follows it. Sinners forget that God has done it before and He will do it again. When the sinful thorn in your flesh persists and you wonder how on earth God could love such a sinner as you, don't you remember how God freely forgave your sin last Sunday? Don't you remember feasting on His Word and Sacrament unto forgiveness until you were satisfied? Don't you remember what great things God has done with your life, working through the least of this world to bring about salvation to others? The disciples forgot that the Lord had not long ago fed 5,000 men, and after Jesus fed the 4,000 here, not three verses later in Mark's Gospel it reads:

*Now they had forgotten to bring bread... and they began discussing among one another the fact that they had no bread.*⁶

They forgot again. So we must say, "Lord Jesus Christ have compassion on your forgetful people for if we leave and journey through this world without your constant provisions, we will faint on the way. If we would leave your Church today without Your compassionate forgiveness, we would faint to sin, death, and the power of the devil. If we left without the Word in our hearts and on our lips, how could we sinners remember it? Lord have compassion on us."

And Jesus said,

*"I have compassion on the crowd..."*⁷

The word for compassion is the Greek σπλαγχνίζομαι [Splachnizomai]. It means to feel in your gut... to have stomach wrenching compassion. Whereas as the

⁵ Mark 8:4

⁶ Mark 8: 14, 16

⁷ Mark 8:2a

crowd's bellies ached with hunger. Whereas your bellies ache with the due consequence of your sinful forgetting. Be not afraid, for Christ's belly aches with compassion.

*And He directed the crowd to sit on the ground. And He took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, He broke them and gave them to His disciples to set before the crowd. And they set them before the crowd. And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, He said that these also should be set before the crowd. And they ate and were satisfied.*⁸

It may have appeared that Christ forgot the crowd's hunger, letting them follow Him into the desert and preaching a three-day sermon. It may appear sometimes that He has forgotten your hunger – that He has forgotten the ache in your belly from the effects of sin – both yours and others. But, as our text today indicates, nothing could be further from the truth. Because Jesus remembers. He remembers for your sake. What is more, He does not remember just for the Jews, just for the ones who by all appearances are “better Christians” than yourself. No, here in the feeding of the 4,000 we are reminded that Christ remembers for the gentiles too. He remembers for the least of the world... for the worst sinners. He remembers for all people.

Where you forget to pray before a meal, Jesus did not. He took the seven loaves and gave thanks. When you forget to make time in the Word, Jesus did not. There in the desert he taught for three straight days. When you forget that the Lord provides Jesus did not. For from the seven loaves He gave food to thousands. Jesus remembers... And He remembers for your sake.

He remembered you even into death on a cross. Even while dying Jesus remembered sinners. When sinners nailed him to the cross Jesus remembered them in prayer saying,

*“Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing.”*⁹

When the thief crucified with our Lord requested in agony,

⁸ Mark 8: 6-8a

⁹ Luke 23: 34

“Lord remember me when you come into your Kingdom.”¹⁰

So Jesus answered his prayer saying,

“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”¹¹

Jesus remembers. He remembered you when He was crucified and placed in the grave. He remembered you when He descended into hell, when He rose from the grave, when He came into His Kingdom. He remembers you even now as He sits at the right hand of the Father interceding for you. As He remembered the ones who nailed Him to the cross forgiving their sins, as He remembered the lowly thief on the cross promising him life eternal in paradise, as He remembered to feed the foolish forgetful crowd, so Jesus also remembers you.

He remembers your needs so much that He sends rains from the heavens to water the earth that it may bring forth crops for you. He remembers your needs so much that He gives you clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals and all that you have. He provides for you in this desolate place. And what is more, He remembers your needs so much that He gives you pastors to distribute His spiritual provisions among you – to preach to you the forgiveness of sins, to absolve you in His stead, to pour the Baptismal waters over your head, to administer His Holy Sacrament among you, to set before the crowds an abundance of heavenly food, Christ’s own body and blood under the bread and wine, given to hungry and weak sinners that they might not faint on the way. He provides for you in this desolate place. Jesus remembers you. And in His remembrance, He forgives you for all of your sins. He does not send you away hungry. He has compassion on you.

The extent of Christ’s remembering is evident in the abundance of food leftover after the feeding of the 4,000.

And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets.¹²

¹⁰ Luke 23:42

¹¹ Luke 23: 43

¹² Mark 8:8b

The grace of God is always in abundance. He never just gives you a little bit. Though to outward appearances it may seem like a mere splash of water on the head, mere words spoken from a mere man, mere bread and mere wine, a meager seven loaves for 4,000 people. The grace of God is so much more than meets the eye. For through such mere things the Lord chooses to work for your salvation. Don't forget that the grace of God is always given in abundance. The depth of His mercy does not run out. When you leave this place today, as the 4,000 also left to go home, don't forget the seven baskets which they gathered that day in the desert. Don't forget that there is always more. Don't forget all that the Lord has given to you...

... that He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all ... will graciously give us all things.¹³

Keep coming to Bible study whenever you can – on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday. Read the Word in your homes, give thanks for all things and pray. Don't let yourself think that the heavenly food here will run out. Don't let yourself think that you carry a sin too heinous for the compassion of Jesus. Remember the seven baskets. Remember that Jesus has compassion. Amen.

And the Peace of God which passes all human understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Wednesday after the seventh Sunday after Trinity

Mark 8:1-9

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¹³ Romans 8:32