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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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 of 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 in 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: “<sup>20</sup>Now 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, <sup>21</sup>to 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.

**OLD TESTAMENT READING***Exodus 16:2–21*

<sup>2</sup>And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, <sup>3</sup>and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

<sup>4</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. <sup>5</sup>On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily." <sup>6</sup>So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, "At evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, <sup>7</sup>and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against the LORD. For what are we, that you grumble against us?" <sup>8</sup>And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD."

<sup>9</sup>Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, 'Come near before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.'" <sup>10</sup>And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. <sup>11</sup>And the LORD said to Moses, <sup>12</sup>"I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'"

<sup>13</sup>In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. <sup>14</sup>And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. <sup>15</sup>When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. <sup>16</sup>This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an omer, according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent.'" <sup>17</sup>And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some less. <sup>18</sup>But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat. <sup>19</sup>And Moses said to them, "Let no one leave any of it over till the morning." <sup>20</sup>But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them. <sup>21</sup>Morning by morning they gathered it, each as much as he could eat; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.

P: This is the Word of the Lord.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

**EPISTLE***Galatians 4:21–31*

<sup>21</sup>Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? <sup>22</sup>For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. <sup>23</sup>But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. <sup>24</sup>Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is

Hagar. <sup>25</sup>Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. <sup>26</sup>But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. <sup>27</sup>For it is written,

“Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear;  
break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor!  
For the children of the desolate one will be more  
than those of the one who has a husband.”

<sup>28</sup>Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. <sup>29</sup>But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. <sup>30</sup>But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.” <sup>31</sup>So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

P: This is the Word of the Lord.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

## **HOLY GOSPEL**

*John 6:1–15*

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the sixth chapter.

**C: Glory be to Thee, O Lord.**

<sup>1</sup>After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. <sup>2</sup>And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. <sup>3</sup>Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. <sup>4</sup>Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. <sup>5</sup>Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” <sup>6</sup>He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. <sup>7</sup>Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” <sup>8</sup>One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, <sup>9</sup>“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?” <sup>10</sup>Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. <sup>11</sup>Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. <sup>12</sup>And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.” <sup>13</sup>So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten. <sup>14</sup>When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!”