

NEW BEGINNINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost – July 21st, 2024 (11:11 am)

FIVE TWO

Psalm 23
Jeremiah 23:1-6
Ephesians 2:11-22
Mark 6:30-44

The Lord Jesus Shepherds His Church on Earth by the Ministry of the Gospel

The Lord rebukes and removes *“the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep”* (Jer. 23:1). He gathers the flock, brings them back to the fold, and sets *“shepherds over them who will care for them”* (Jer. 23:3-4). He raises up the Son of David, the great Good Shepherd, to *“reign as king and deal wisely”* (Jer. 23:5). He is *“our righteousness,”* in whom we *“dwell securely”* (Jer. 23:6). He has compassion on all of us, who were *“like sheep without a shepherd”* (Mark 6:34). Not only does He teach us many things, but taking the bread, He blesses and breaks and gives it to the disciples *“to set before the people”* (Mark 6:41). He abundantly provides for His Church on earth, so that everyone is fed and fully satisfied in body and soul. He preaches peace *“to you who were far off,”* and *“by the blood of Christ,”* He brings you near (Eph. 2:13, 17). Though you were *“separated from Christ”* by your sin, *“having no hope and without God in the world”* (Eph. 2:12), now *“you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God”* (Eph. 2:19).

In today’s Gospel, we heard that Jesus fed 5,000 men, and probably more when you include women and children—up to 20,000 people. He fed them with this: “It is filled with omega-3, vitamins such as D and B2, rich in calcium and phosphorus, and a great source of minerals. The American Heart Association recommends eating fish at least twice a week as part of a healthy diet.” Jesus gave them fish, which nourishes them and helps reduce the risk of a heart attack.

The other thing is that bread is “a staple in the human diet. After thousands of years, it remains one of the most regularly consumed foods in the world due to its convenience, portability, nutrition, and taste. It has calcium, fibre, and iron,” and as this website says, “for your healthiest bread options, you shouldn’t eat white bread but whole grains. Bonus points if you are buying from an artisan baker or making your own.”

In the Gospel, we see Jesus caring about those people’s physical needs. Sometimes we say, “Well, my church has 150 souls,” but I see some bodies in front of me right now. As a church, we are both soul and body. Jesus takes care of us, and He shows it here by giving them fish and loaves.

Now, He didn’t get a truck or semi-trailer and go to a wholesale house to buy thousands of fish and loaves. He had five loaves and two fish (FIVE TWO), yet He fed 5,000 men. Here is the first takeaway from our Gospel today: Jesus performs a miracle. He asks His disciples to bring Him fish and loaves, and He performs a miracle. Sometimes we try to find the physics or rationale behind Jesus’ miracles. For example, when He walks on water,

some people suggest there was a rocky path under the water where Jesus stepped. But even Peter, an experienced fisherman who grew up in that area, sank. So even if it were possible, it is still a miracle because Jesus walked in the midst of a storm.

When we try to explain miracles logically, we often end up in a conundrum because we would then need to explain the Trinity, how God died on the cross, how the Bible became the Word of God, and so forth. Christians can look into the Bible and see these as miracles without reducing them to the size of our minds. Trying to explain miracles logically reduces God's power to what we can understand and bear.

It is good that Jesus does miracles. He shows that He does miracles in their lives back then and today in our lives. Sometimes, when we are in trouble, we may run out of alternatives because we try to think rationally about what we should do. "I don't think God will help me here or there; is there a solution for this?" And we don't leave room for God to perform miracles and open unexpected doors for us. Jesus opened an unexpected door for His disciples by saying, "**Bring it to Me.**" Mark doesn't write this, but we know from other Gospels that Jesus said, "**Bring it to Me.**" Do not bring it to the baker to make more loaves; **bring it to Me.** That is Christ's Word for you too. **Bring it to Me.** I am the one who performs miracles.

Jesus didn't turn His back when the disciples suggested, "Hey Jesus, why don't You give them an excuse? We have a commitment, our schedule is full, let's just take off." Jesus didn't do that because He was bound to His mission. He wanted to be with people, help them, and connect with them.

When you see a family with kids in dire straits, maybe without food for the evening, what do you do? "Come here, I will pray with you. God bless you, bye, I hope you find food!" No, if we can, we will try to help and connect. If we see people with personal problems or who could improve their knowledge, would we just confirm that in them? Of course not, we try to help and be with them, as Jesus did.

The text says Jesus looks at all those people, runs to them, even gets to where they were going before them because He is compassionate. He sees them as sheep without a shepherd, cares for them, and provides for their physical needs with fish and loaves. But before that, He is compassionate about them and begins to teach them many things, concerned about their spiritual health. He wanted to bring them food for the body and the soul.

Bringing back the illustration from the beginning, if Jesus gave them energy, low calories, and cardiovascular health from fish and loaves as convenient, portable nutrition,

He also brought the same for their souls through His Word. His Word improves cardiovascular health, nourishing our hearts and bringing God's love. Fish helps with insomnia, and God's Word can also treat insomnia by providing forgiveness and peace.

The Word is convenient and portable; we can read the Bible anywhere. Jesus brings these ingredients with His Word because He is compassionate. He wants to feed you and be by your side, providing food for faith. This is our mission as the church: to bring people food for their faith, something no government or institution can do with the same commitment as Christians. We aim to help people, but mainly to bring them food for their faith. Jesus proposes spiritual healthy food that nourishes life.

A good word can carry a person through a difficult time. Isn't that true? When someone says, "I admire you! You are a beautiful person!" it motivates us for months. Now, imagine the Word of God bringing us everything we need to endure difficult times. Receiving food for faith means listening to God.

I heard an illustration of a father saying to a friend, "I can't understand my teenage son; he doesn't listen to me." The friend replied, "To understand someone, you need to listen to them, not the other way around." Sometimes we need to listen to God's Word carefully. When we do, we receive the food we need.

Regarding daily food, there are three types: 1) The food we eat, 2) The food we long for, and 3) The food we need. If Jesus conducted a survey among the crowd, He might think, "What do we have? Fish and loaves." Sometimes we hear the Word of God and it's not what we long for, but it is what we need for our faith.

It's important to have healthy food regularly. If you have one healthy meal but eat unhealthy meals the rest of the time, your body will be unbalanced. The same is true for our spiritual life. We have healthy food at church and in our daily life with Christ. If we keep consuming spiritually unhealthy content, we can't expect to stay healthy.

Interacting with the world is good, but we need to come back to God's Word. Jesus always provides the food we need, even if it's not what we want at the moment. His Gospel restores us with forgiveness and love obtained on the cross for us.

In conclusion, we hear "Life is short" often, and it can be even shorter if we eat unhealthy food. This also applies to our spiritual life. Depending on where we seek nourishment, our spiritual life can be short or shorter. If Jesus performed miracles with fish and loaves, imagine the nourishment His Word brings to our hearts and souls.

His Word and Sacraments bring us life, forgiveness, and new life, generating care and compassion for others. That is the food from God that we need. Amen.