

“The Lord Satisfies”

Matthew 14:13-21

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Imagine that you are traveling with your friends or family to a place you know is desolate and far away from the nearest city. You prepare for the journey by packing a specific amount of food and water, knowing just how much you need to care for all of those in your party. After all, that's good practice when preparing to go on a camping trip, especially when it is more remote than you might usually go. But halfway through your first day, another 5,000+ people show up to camp with you. You enjoy their company for many hours into the evening, until it is time for you to go and have your dinner, only to find out that the people who showed up have nothing for themselves. You are miles and miles from the nearest store, and even then, it's only a little country store that may or may not have any food for them. What are you to do with your measly provisions? Satisfy only a few of the massive number, leaving the rest hungry?

That's where the disciples find themselves in our text this morning. They've only recently returned from their long journeys having been sent out in pairs by the Lord, and now gather on the far side of the sea of Galilee to meet with Jesus. This was meant to be a secluded meeting—a gathering of only Jesus and His students. But the crowds who were enamored with Christ's miracles and teachings had other plans. They follow Jesus across the sea (around it) to be healed by Him and to listen to Him. A crowd of more than 5,000 people gathers around in that desolate place until the end of the day, and then finds themselves in need of sustenance. The disciples' answer is to simply send them away into the surrounding villages that they might find their own food. They don't have enough to share with all of them, so that is simply not an option. At least not in their current little faith. The people don't need to seek out their own satisfaction, because as you can see from Jesus' response to the Twelve, it is the Lord who satisfies. It is He who provides all good things according to His divine grace and mercy.

The disciples really should know better by now, at least one might think. They have seen the Lord cast out demons, heal the sick, and even they themselves have cast out evil spirits in their travels abroad as they proclaimed the Kingdom. Yet, still, they doubt the Lord's provision. He sent them out with nothing and told them to trust in the people of the towns to provide for them, and they did. But now when He tells them to feed the large crowd of people, they respond with, “That's impossible!” Their issue is not a lack of enough food, having only five loaves and two fish, but their issue is a lack of faith. They have chosen to trust in worldly knowledge instead of the knowledge of faith they

have by the gift of the Spirit. These people that have gathered around the Lord Jesus must go out and care for themselves, because Jesus has given them enough.

Imagine the scene—thousands upon thousands of people exhausted, hungry, and many who are ill. The disciples themselves are tired and hungry, and even depriving themselves would not be enough to take care of such a large crowd. You can sense that in their response to the Lord who says, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” They quip back, “We have only five loaves here and two fish.” He doesn’t say it here, but you can almost hear the standard response of Christ in these moments, “O you of little faith.” The Twelve are suffering from a weak faith, one which needs to be fed according to the Lord’s provision, and not supplemented by their logic and reason. Their sinful flesh is getting in the way, and it will continue to get in the way, just as it has for the entirety of their time with Jesus (and will continue for the rest of their days).

Every one of you are guilty of the same fallacy. You bear the sinful flesh, and that leads to you at many times in your life being one of little faith. Your Old Adam seeks to find every possible way to make you doubt the Lord’s provision in your life, and to look everywhere except to Him for all of your needs. That is the work of the evil one who presents all kinds of “other options” that lead you to believe it’s on you to figure it out and it’s up to you to make the right decisions that will lead to good things in your life. But those lies that he sows among you are tempting. It’s tempting for your sinful nature to believe that maybe he’s right, and there is a part for you to play in getting good things. It wants you to buy into the idea that the Lord doesn’t provide for you, but you have to make the decision to provide for yourself. Look out for number one, as they say.

Which is why if faith is your responsibility to find and strengthen, you have no hope. Believing that there is power within yourself to overcome the world and you don’t need God’s help to do it, or that you have to somehow start the process in order for God to help you, leaves you “separated from Christ...having no hope and without God in the world (Eph. 2:12).” The crowds in our text came to find Jesus because they had faith that He would care for them in both body and soul. The disciples serve Jesus among the great crowd because they have faith, but their sinful flesh just will not give them any peace. They want to know how they are supposed to help Jesus when they can barely help themselves. But Jesus is not deterred in His mission to strengthen and sustain those who have come.

Even in the presence of their lack of faith, Jesus gives an abundance of provision. Because it is not they who must “close the gap” between their lack of faith and what the Lord seeks to give. He gives abundantly even in the face of faithlessness. You do not

receive what the Lord gives because you deserve it or have earned it. You receive what the Lord has to give because, just like He has compassion on the crowd, He has compassion on you. He sustains them with food for their bodies, but also strengthens their faith with food for their souls. He gives freely with no expectation that they do something in return or do anything to initiate His compassion. Every gift the Lord seeks to give to the world He gives out of His divine love and His desire that all would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. That is His motivation, and that is why the people receive His provision.

Jesus satisfies the hungry heart, not because the heart is hungry, but because He has satisfied all that is needed to satiate it. He has made satisfaction for sin, having gone to the cross to be the propitiation for your sins and thus bringing reconciliation with God and man. The food He gave to those 5,000+ people was not just bread and fish, but food that brought faith and joy to the hearts of His people. And He did so through His called servants. The disciples failed in figuring out how to provide food for the crowd, because it was not for them to figure it out. Their purpose is to serve that which the Lord gave them to give to His people. They are called to feed the people with the food that sustains faith, and that is what His Church is called to do even today. The Word of the Lord is that very food. By the proclamation of the Holy Gospel, Christians are strengthened and fed by His Word of salvation.

That is what the Lord tells Peter in John 21, when He says to the Apostle, “Feed my lambs...tend my sheep...feed my sheep.” The Word is the means by which the Lord provides for and tends to His sheep, and He has given that task to His called servants to be His undershepherds and care for His flock in just that way. In the proper preaching of Law and Gospel, and the right administration of the Holy Sacraments, the Lord’s satisfaction for His people is seen most clearly. His means of grace are not hard to find, and it is not given to the Church to figure out how to provide the food of faith. Jesus Himself has instituted the means by which that is to be done. Through the preaching of the Gospel of Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 1:23), you hear that all the work of redemption has been done. In the waters of baptism, you see that God has chosen you as His own dear child, to be His adopted son and share in the eternal inheritance of Christ. And in the Sacrament of the Altar, the Lord’s provision is most clearly known among His people. Done in accordance with Christ’s institution, His very body and blood are given to His people to bring forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation in the most concrete way. Heaven is opened and you are given a foretaste of the feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end. You are given a foretaste of His eternal satisfaction.

The Lord provides all things to His people. Every provision, good health, or joyful event is a result of His love for you. Certainly, there are those in the world who have all of these even though they are not among the elect. But even they are sustained and satisfied by the Lord, for He is the Creator and Author of all things, and that applies to all mankind, both faithful and reprobate. Only the Lord satisfies, because without Him everything is found to be empty and only of this world. Temporal things are just that—they are not eternal. They are not made to last. Even the things the Lord provides for you in this life are meant only to last a little while, “but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away (1 Cor. 13:10).” There is an everlasting provision that awaits you as one who has been blessed with faith in the one true God.

In this life He cares for your every need, providing your daily bread of body and soul. All of this points to the everlasting provision that awaits the full communion of saints in the comfort of God’s own house. Everything He gives in this life satisfies for a short while, but what He gives in eternal life is exactly that—everlasting and perfect. The Lord satisfies the needs of His people, and He has made satisfaction for the sins of the world by His blood. By the work of the Son of God upon the cross, He has satisfied the Father’s wrath, and has given you the benefit of that satisfaction in the forgiveness of your sins. You have been satiated by His blood, which now covers you and makes you righteous for His sake alone. And that is the truest and greatest provision the Lord has ever given you. You have everlasting life in His eternal presence, forever to dwell and be satisfied in the presence of His heavenly glory without end. Amen.