

A MODEL FOR THE CHURCH
Sermon for the 8th Sunday after Pentecost, 2021
Mark 6:30-44

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, Mark 6:30-44: ³⁰ **The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to Him everything that they had done and taught.** ³¹ **He told them, “Come away to a deserted place where you can be alone and rest a little!”**

For so many people were coming and going that there was not even time to eat. ³² **They went away in the boat to a deserted place to be alone.** ³³ **However, many people who saw them leaving recognised them, ran there on foot from all the cities and arrived ahead of them.** ³⁴ **When Jesus came out of the boat, He saw a large crowd and felt sorry for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Then He began to teach them many things.**

³⁵ **When it was already late in the day, His disciples came to Him and began to say, “This is a deserted place, and it is already late.** ³⁶ **Send them away, that they may go to the surrounding farms and villages and buy themselves something to eat!”**

³⁷ **Jesus answered them, “You give them something to eat!”**

They asked Him, “Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?”

³⁸ **He asked them, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see!”**

When they had found out, they said, “Five and two fish.”

³⁹ **He ordered them that they should all sit down in groups on the green grass.** ⁴⁰ **So, they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties.** ⁴¹ **After He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven and gave thanks. He broke the loaves apart and kept giving them to His disciples, that they might set them before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all.** ⁴² **They all had enough to eat.** ⁴³ **They took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces of bread and the fish.** ⁴⁴ **There were five thousand men who had eaten the bread.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

All four Gospel’s record the feeding of the five thousand. While the feeding of so many people with only five loaves of bread and two fish is without a doubt a miracle, not every miracle makes it into every Gospel account. So why this one? Indeed, feeding people isn’t as important as healing the sick or casting out demons. It surely is not as important as raising the dead. Why then did the Holy Spirit see to it that this account was included in all four Gospels?

Perhaps one of the reasons why it is so important is that it is a model for the church, and this is what our focus is on today. Here we begin to see the way that *Jesus distributes His gifts to the church*.

A couple of Sundays ago, we read how Jesus had sent out the Twelve on a mission, preaching to the people that they should repent. They also drove out many demons and healed the sick.¹ Just how long they had been gone, we are not told. However, the reports they brought back must have been exciting but perhaps not all necessarily good, since otherwise, Jesus would not have warned them in advance to shake the dust off their feet if their message was not received with joy.

Whenever Jesus was in Capernaum, people did not leave him alone. This time Jesus and His disciples did not even find time to eat, to say nothing about being able to discuss the disciples’ missionary journey in detail. Rest was also needed after their strenuous tour, and so Jesus **told them, “Come away to a deserted place where you can be alone and rest a little!”** **For so many people were coming and going that there was not even time to eat.** ³² **They went away in the boat to a deserted place to be alone.**

¹ Mark 6:12

This effort for some privacy was futile. Noting the direction the boat went, the people headed for the same area on foot and in fact, even arrived ahead of Jesus and His disciples. When they landed, according to John chapter 6, Jesus and His disciples withdrew for a while to a hillside. But our Lord could not resist meeting the needs of the multitude. **“He saw a large crowd and felt sorry for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Then He began to teach them many things.”**

In their synagogues, they were not given the spiritual food they needed and were not directed to the promised Messiah. Christ, the Shepherd who could provide them with what they needed, could not withhold the food they so desperately desired. The disciples wanted the people to go away and buy something for themselves to eat, but Jesus asked the disciples to feed the people.³⁷ **Jesus answered them, “You give them something to eat!” They asked Him, “Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?”**

Two hundred denarii was over half a year’s salary, a substantial amount, and even then, this amount of money would not buy sufficient food to give all of them a little! The disciples were really admitting that they were clueless... helpless even. They must have also forgotten how Jesus, in sending them out, had assured them that they would be provided for.² Of course, Jesus does His best work when we are helpless. It is as the Lord said to Paul, *“My grace is enough for you. For My power is made complete when you are weak”* (2 Corinthians 12:9).

It is after Jesus showed the disciples how they were helpless that He provided the food. He ordered that the people **“should all sit down in groups on the green grass.”**⁴⁰ **So, they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties.**⁴¹ **After He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven and gave thanks. He broke the loaves apart and kept giving them to His disciples, that they might set them before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all.**⁴² **They all had enough to eat.**⁴³ **They took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces of bread and the fish.**⁴⁴ **There were five thousand men who had eaten the bread.”** The meal that Jesus provided was far superior to the meal that the disciples imagined.

Now here is where we see the model for the church. Jesus did not go up and down the rows handing out the bread and fish to the people. No, after taking the bread and fish and giving thanks, **“He broke the loaves apart and kept giving them to His disciples, that they might set them before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all.”** Jesus put His marvellous gifts into the hands of His sinful, helpless, clueless disciples. It was the disciples who set the food before the people.

Now, if we think we are a little hard on the disciples, remember who they are. Look at James and John. When a Samaritan village did not welcome Jesus, they asked, *“Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and destroy them?”* (Luke 9:54). Then there was Peter, who caused Jesus to rebuke him and say, *“Get behind Me, Satan! For you do not have in mind the things of God but the things of men”* (Mark 8:33). The disciples regularly argued among themselves about who was the greatest.³ Then of course, there was Judas to whom Jesus would eventually say, *“Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”* (Luke 22:48).

Should we imagine that the food that Judas handed out was any less nutritious because it had come from the hand of the one who would betray Jesus? Of course not. It is Jesus who made the food. James, John, Peter, Judas, and the others were merely His servants. Jesus had made the food, and it was perfect, no matter who handled it after He had made it.

Do you see the model for the church? Jesus calls men even to be his servants, distributing His perfect gifts. How is this done today? Through the office of the holy ministry. To His pastors, He says, “You give them My gifts: forgiveness, salvation, eternal life.” Just as Jesus had once put bread and fish into the hands of His sinful, helpless, clueless disciples, He still puts the gifts of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life into the hands of His pastors who are still sinful, helpless, and yes, often clueless. Just as the fish and bread that had come from the hands of James, John, Peter, and even Judas was just as healthy and nutritious as when it left Jesus’ hand, so also the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation are valid even though our pastor daily sins much.

² Mark 6:8-10

³ Mark 9:34; Luke 22:24

Of course, Jesus does His best work when we are helpless, or, as the angel Gabriel told Mary, *“Nothing will be impossible with God”* (Luke 1:37).

In fact, even as Gabriel spoke to Mary, the Son of God had taken up human flesh in her womb. He had come down in order to do His best work, namely, *the work of salvation*. With His perfect life, He provided the righteousness we needed. Then with His sacrifice on the cross, He paid our sin debt in full. With His resurrection, He declared His victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil.

Shortly after Jesus had risen from the dead, He appeared to His disciples again and said to them, *“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, I also am sending you.”*²² After He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, *“Receive the Holy Spirit! ²³ If you forgive any people’s sins, they have been forgiven; if you retain any people’s sins, they have been retained”* (John 20:21-23). With these words, He gave the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation into the hands of these disciples. With these words, these disciples became His sent ones, His Apostles. With these words, He has given the church the authority to forgive sins.

But wait, there’s more! Jesus gives the gift of forgiveness in many ways. Before He ascended, He also said, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.”*¹⁹ *Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations by baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*²⁰ *and by teaching them to keep all that I have commanded you! Certainly, I am with you always, until the end of the age”* (Matthew 28:18-20). With these words, He authorised the church to open up more channels of forgiveness. First of all, there is Holy Baptism, the Word of God combined with water according to Christ’s command. Then there is teaching, Christ’s Church satisfying the hunger of Christ’s people with the study of Christ’s Word. These are two more gifts that Jesus has given into the hands of His people - the Holy Christian Church.

Finally, there is yet another gift that the Apostle Paul explained to the Church in Corinth. The Apostle Paul writes, *“For I received from the Lord what I have also passed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night when He was being betrayed, took bread.”*²⁴ *When He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “This is My body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me!”*²⁵ *In the same way He also took the cup after the meal. He said, “This cup is the new Covenant in My blood. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of Me!”* (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

During the Reformation, some of the laity had found out that their old priests had been corrupt. They were worried that everything that a corrupt priest did was invalid. Martin Luther said, *“It is easy to reply to all kinds of questions about which people are troubled at the present time, such as this one: “Can even a wicked priest serve at and administer the Sacrament?” And whatever other questions like this there may be. For here we conclude and say, “Even though an imposter takes or distributes the Sacrament, a person still receives the true Sacrament, that is, Christ’s true body and blood, just as truly as a person who <receives or> administers it in the most worthy way.” For the Sacrament is not founded upon people’s holiness, but upon God’s Word. Just as no saint on earth, indeed, no angel in heaven can make bread and wine be Christ’s body and blood, so also no one can change or alter it, even though it is misused. The Word by which it became a Sacrament and was instituted does not become false because of the person or his unbelief. For Christ does not say, “If you believe or are worthy, you receive My body and blood.” No, He says, “Take, eat and drink; this is My body and blood.” ...That is like saying, “No matter whether you are worthy or unworthy, you have here His body and blood by virtue of these words that are added to the bread and wine”* (Large Catechism: Of the Sacrament of the Altar, par. 15).

Paul teaches that Jesus has put His very body and His very blood into the hands of sinful men to be given as gifts of forgiveness to God’s people, and Luther in the quote above reinforces that. Not only that, but Paul also teaches that these gifts should be handed down from generation to generation when he says, *“For, whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming the Lord’s death, until He comes”* (1 Corinthians 11:26).

The gifts of God depend on the promise of Jesus Christ *and nothing else*. They do not depend on the holiness of the pastor, or our holiness, or our faith, or our pastor’s faith. It is the promise of Christ alone that makes these

gifts perfect. The pastor is simply the steward⁴ who serves these gifts according to Christ's command. He is the ordained servant of Christ.

So we see how the feeding of the five thousand is a model for the church. Jesus has prepared His perfect gifts of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. He prepared them with His holy life and His precious death. Now that He has risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, He gives these gifts to His servants so that they can set them before you, His forgiven brothers and sisters.

Our presence here, in this place, can do nothing for God. Instead, we come before God in this place because, although God is truly everywhere, this is where He has promised to reveal His presence and give His gifts to us. This is where He serves us. We come because He has called us with His Gospel and enlightened us with His gifts. We come because it is God's delight to pour out His gifts on us, and it is His gifts that make us part of his family forever. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Most holy and eternal God, You rule over all, and have given us victory over all our enemies. We come before You with humble hearts to praise You.

We thank You that You so richly supply the world with daily bread, that You fill the earth with untold resources, that You give every seed the miracle of growth, and send the rain to make fruitful the efforts of those who farm the soil. But, above all else, we thank You for that great love that has satisfied the hunger of our souls by sending from heaven the bread of life, Jesus Christ Your Son. Grant that we may believe in Him with all our hearts, and find joy and satisfaction in Him alone. Help us each day to turn to Him who was wounded because of our sins, and bruised because of our iniquities, so that by His punishment we may be cleansed, healed, and forgiven, and may know in Him the joy of unbroken fellowship with You.

Gracious God, You know that we are weak and sinful. Give us the strength that we do not have of ourselves. Fill us with faith, hope, and love, so that we may live as Your children and enjoy life in all its fullness. Give us the power to stand firm in the spiritual battles of this life, the resolve to be Your true and loyal servants, and the ability to conquer our sins and to live in righteousness.

Bless Your Church, O God. Supply it with pastors who pray without ceasing, proclaim Your Word with boldness, call people to repentance and faith, and prepare them for the final coming of Jesus our Saviour and judge. Give all of us opportunities to speak the Gospel to others, and grant that we may do it with certainty and conviction, with a sense of urgency, and with genuine love for people's bodily and spiritual welfare.

We thank You for the many mercies You have shown to our country, and pray that You would turn the hearts of those who openly oppose Your will to true repentance. Strengthen all forces of righteousness in our midst, and overthrow all the powers of evil. Teach us to trust in You, for You alone help and protect us.

Bless our homes with Your continual presence and help. Put Your Word in the hearts of children, and Your love in the lives of parents, so that they may all enjoy the bread of life for ever.

Deal mercifully with those among us who are suffering, bereaved, lonely, and depressed. Free them from their troubles, and bind them to You, that they may know the security of Your presence, and live to serve and praise You. Be with all those who are suffering the effects of the ongoing covid-19 pandemic.

All these things we ask in the precious name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour, who, together with You and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 4:1

The 8th Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 23:1-6

¹ “How horrible it will be for the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture!” declares the LORD.

² Therefore, this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, has said about the shepherds who are looking after my people: “You have scattered My flock, driven them away and have not taken care of them. Look! I am punishing you for the evil that you have done,” declares the LORD. ³ “However, I Myself shall gather the remnant of My flock from all the countries where I have driven them and bring them back to their pasture, and they will be fruitful and increase in number. ⁴ I shall appoint shepherds over them who will look after them. Then they will no longer be afraid or terrified, and none of them will be missing,” declares the LORD.

⁵ “Look! The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I shall raise up for David a righteous Branch, who will reign wisely as King. He will establish justice and righteousness on the earth. ⁶ In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will live in safety. This will be His name, which people will call Him, ‘The LORD Our Righteousness.’

Ephesians 2:11-22

¹¹ Remember, then, that once you were Gentiles in a bodily way, called “Uncircumcised” by those who were called “the Circumcised,” in a bodily, hand-made way. ¹² Remember that at that time you were without Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and strangers to God’s Covenants of promise! You had no hope and were without God in the world.

¹³ However, now, in Christ Jesus, the blood of Christ has brought you, who once were far away, near. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our Peace. In His human nature He has made them both, Jew and Gentile, one, by breaking down the wall of hostility that kept them apart. ¹⁵ He has abolished the Law with its Commandments and Regulations, to create the two into one new person in Himself, so making peace, ¹⁶ and that He may reconcile them both to God in one body through His cross, on which He has killed the hostility. ¹⁷ He came, telling the Good News of peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through Him we both have access, by one Spirit, to the Father.

¹⁹ Therefore, you are no longer foreigners and strangers but fellow citizens with God’s holy people

and members of God’s household. ²⁰ You have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and Christ Jesus Himself is the Cornerstone. ²¹ In Him the whole building is fitted together and grows to be a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In Him the Spirit also is building you up, with the others, into God’s dwelling-place.

Mark 6:30-44

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