

John 6:1-15 (Laetare)  
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.  
March 27, 2022

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

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

As you can see on your bulletin cover, today is Laetare Sunday. “Laetare” is Latin for “rejoice!” You might have noticed during Advent and now during Lent, and pretty soon during the Easter season, that each Sunday is named for the first word of the Introit in Latin. Today is Laetare Sunday, “rejoice” Sunday, because the Introit begins with the words of Isaiah 66: “Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad with her, that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast.” “Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad with her.” During the penitential season of Advent, we had one Sunday dedicated to rejoicing, Gaudete Sunday. Now, during the penitential season of Lent, we have one Sunday dedicated to rejoicing, Laetare Sunday. In the midst of repenting over our sins, we ought not lose sight of the joy we have in Christ. So today we rejoice!

We rejoice because even in the desert of Lent, in the wilderness of this world, our LORD Jesus Christ comes to us and refreshes us. We rejoice because God feeds us, not just with spiritual milk, but with solid food. Our God comes to us and gives us everything we need during our pilgrimage in this world, traveling on our way to the resurrection of the dead and life in the new heavens and the new earth. Just as Jesus miraculously fed the 5,000 in the wilderness, so does our Good Shepherd lead us and feed us in both body and soul. He came that we might have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10).

Our text for this morning begins, “After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.” Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee because his relative John the Baptist had just been

beheaded by Herod (Matt 14). Jesus then withdrew to a desolate, isolated place as He often did. He and His disciples needed time to mourn and to rest, time to pray, time to think. They were so busy there wasn't even time to eat (Mk 6:31). You may have experienced something similar when a loved one dies. There is so much to do, plans to make, people to receive...it all gets so exhausting. You simply need time to mourn and to rest, time to pray, time to think. But the crowds heard where Jesus was and they pursued Him. They knew Jesus could heal their sick and Jesus did not disappoint. Even when Jesus and His disciples should have been resting, the mission continued. Jesus kept healing the people and proclaiming the Kingdom of God (Lk 9:11).

Again, Jesus withdrew with His disciples, this time up the mountain. They needed to figure out what to do with this throng of people who had arrived, 5,000 men, and certainly more women and children besides. Jesus tested Philipp's faith by asking where they would buy bread for all those people. Philipp knew there was no way they could afford enough bread for even some of the people. He is thinking in a worldly, fleshly way without recognizing the power of God. Philipp looks to what he and the disciples are able to do and not to what Jesus is able to do. Then Andrew pointed out the boy with five barley loaves and two fish, but he is merely scoffing; it's not like those meager portions could help. Again, Andrew points out what the disciples are able to do with what is at hand. He does not focus on what Jesus is able to accomplish. Andrew is thinking in a worldly, fleshly way without recognizing the power of God.

How often in our own lives do we find ourselves in a deserted place with no provisions? When do our best laid plans come to nothing? You all know what it feels like to be alone, isolated, and not sure where you will turn. There are so many situations in our lives where we find ourselves in a deserted place, a wilderness where we don't know if we'll be able to free

ourselves. We consider only how dire the situation is, or we look at the meager rations we do have and realize we cannot help ourselves. Our sinful tendency is to turn to our own wits or our own resources to solve whatever problems we find ourselves in. And when that fails, to despair. Our sinful tendency is to think in a fleshly, worldly way first before we even consider turning to God for help. Like Philip we despair when we realize we can't get out of a mess on our own. Like Andrew, we see that what we have is certainly not enough. The one place we often forget to look is where we should have been looking all along: Jesus Christ, the healer and miracle worker.

But Jesus is there, Jesus is here. He has the ability to accomplish what we cannot even begin. Jesus had the disciples sit the people down in the grass, all 5,000+ of them. Jesus took the meager rations the disciples were able to acquire, the five loaves and the two fish. Just like any other meal, Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed the bread to the people. So also the fish, as much as the people needed to be satisfied. And even then there were twelve baskets full of leftovers, enough to feed even more people later! Five loaves of bread and two fish, enough food for over 5,000 people! Our God is an abundant God! He provides what we need and so much more. The disciples didn't have a clue about what they should do, but Jesus knew what He would do all along.

Jesus's message was "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matt 6:33). And now Jesus preaches that same sermon by His actions. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and the other things will fall into place. No need to be anxious about tomorrow. Jesus takes care of even our daily troubles. His strength makes up for our weaknesses, His power overrules our shortcomings. His provision refreshes us in the desert. His death makes us right with both God and man, so we don't need to worry about what other people think. Jesus provides us with exactly what we need exactly when

we need it. And He does all this for us superabundantly, like feeding more than 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish.

Nowhere do we see the abundance our LORD provides for us and all people so clearly as in His death on the cross, and where we receive the fruits of that death, in the Lord's Supper. The Apostle John tells us the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 occurred when the Passover was at hand. The reason so many people were coming to Jesus was because the Jews had come from all over the world to celebrate the Passover, the festival commemorating God's deliverance of His people from slavery in Egypt. That was the night the unblemished lamb was slain and his blood was painted on the doorframe so the angel of death would pass by. On another Passover, on the night He was betrayed, our LORD would again take bread, give thanks, break it, and distribute it saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

Jesus Christ died for all people and won forgiveness, life, and salvation for all people. His grace is superabundant, and the way He gives us that grace in our lives is superabundant. Just consider that same Lord's Supper we celebrate every Sunday. Our LORD comes to us not only with His Word and with His Absolution, He also comes to us in this particular, tangible way where He feeds us His body and blood in the bread and wine for the forgiveness of our sins. This meal is not only celebrated by us here and now, it is celebrated around the world constantly and has been for nearly 2,000 years. And everytime the Lord's Supper is celebrated, our LORD Jesus Christ is miraculously there to feed sinners with His life-giving body and blood. As we often sing: "Though reason cannot understand, Yet faith this truth embraces: Your body, Lord, is even now At once in many places." Just as Jesus fed over 5,000 with the two fish and five loaves, so

does Jesus feed people around the world at all times and places with His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. And of course, there's always room for more people!

As a picture of this connection between the feeding of the 5,000 and the Lord's Supper, you often see fish depicted at the Lord's Supper. Take for example, the window before your eyes every Sunday. There probably weren't fish served at the Last Supper. Remember, it was lamb on the menu. But the earliest depictions of the Lord's Supper from the catacombs often include fish, recalling the miracle of the loaves and the fish. This was not by accident; rather Jesus Himself makes this connection for us. Keep reading on in John 6, and you will come to where Jesus tells the people He had just fed with bread and fish that they should seek not after earthly food, but after the true heavenly food of His flesh and blood. "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:54). Just as Jesus miraculously fed so many people, so does He do even today with His body and blood in the Lord's Supper.

Jesus continues to feed us in both body and soul unto life everlasting. He grants us respite in the wilderness of this world, refreshment in this desert. As we pray after receiving Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper: "We give thanks to You, almighty God, that You have refreshed us through this salutary gift." Or again, as we often sing: "Your Supper in this vale of tears Refreshes me and stills my fears" (LSB 622). Today, in the midst of Lent, we rejoice because our LORD comes to us in just the right way and at just the right time. Jesus abundantly supplies our every need in both body and soul unto life everlasting. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.