

Mark 8:1–9
7th Sun. after Trinity
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
July 23, 2023

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,

A Christian is called upon to prefer that which is spiritual to that which is bodily, the eternal to the temporal, and the heavenly to the earthly. That's why Jesus says of food, drink, and clothing: "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matt 6:33). Seek first the spiritual, the eternal, the heavenly, and all these bodily, temporal, and earthly goods will be added to you according to God's good and gracious will. If God gives you the greater part, eternal life, how could He not also bless you with the lesser part, those earthly gifts that keep body and soul together until your life-span has run its course? If you focus only on your bodily needs to the neglect of what is spiritual, you will lose both body and soul in Hell. But if you focus on what is spiritual, the "one thing needful," the Word of God and His Kingdom, and are willing to give up everything in this life for the sake of eternal life, God will grant you a hundredfold now in this time, and in the age to come eternal life (Mk 10:30). In our Gospel Lesson this morning, the feeding of the 4,000, we see how the large crowd was willing to forego all temporal goods for the sake of God's Word, and so the LORD granted them both spiritual and earthly blessings in Jesus Christ.

The great crowd gathered together to hear God's Word. They knew Jesus was a teacher come from God and they knew Jesus taught with authority. He proved as much with His miraculous healings. The crowd sought to hear God's Word directly from the source, and their desire for God's Word far outweighed any earthly troubles or needs. They sat and listened to

Jesus teach for three days, without giving a thought to their earthly plight. Even if some did bring provisions, it wasn't enough to last this length of time. The people were more hungry for the Word of God than for bread that perishes. By day three, long after any reasonable person would have returned home to eat and to rest, the crowd was still there, hanging on to every word of Jesus and giving no thought to the provision of the flesh (Rom 13:14). They were so intent on the destination that they forgot to fuel up, at least according to their physical needs. Spiritually, they found in Jesus everything they truly needed.

According to the unbelieving world, these people are crazy fanatics. Who in their right mind would give up everything, including daily bread, to follow Jesus? Who would throw caution to the wind by putting life and limb on the line for the sake of listening to this one teacher? There's plenty of time to listen to the preaching of God's Word, so why risk so much to hear it right now? According to the unbelieving world, you, too, dear Christian are a crazy fanatic. Some of those who listen to our services online live in countries where they could be killed for seeking to learn from Jesus. And to some, that sounds like a crazy idea. But even in the cozy West, many think *you* are a crazy fanatic for holding to God's Word. Once I heard it put like this: "With two days in the week off of work, who in their right mind would spend one of those days going to church?" And that's just for one day! Imagine what the world thinks when you go to midweek services, Confessions' Study, and all the meetings besides. The world laughs at you for taking time out of your busy schedule to gather with other Christians and hear the Word of God. The world mocks you and scoffs at you for spending all that money and energy to get to church so early in the morning. How could you come all the way to Germany and waste your time, money, and energy on going to church? Why would you voluntarily give up your peace and comfort for awkward encounters with a bunch of hypocrites? The unbelieving world truly thinks

you're insane for the things you give up to hear the preaching of God's Word and the earthly pleasures you forfeit to be part of a Christian community.

Jesus called His disciples to Him and said: "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away." The LORD knows the needs of His people. He knows everything they've given up for the sake of hearing His word because He knows what it means to sacrifice what is temporal for that which is eternal, what is earthly for that which is heavenly. The LORD knows what the unbelieving world thinks of these people because it's the same way the unbelieving world thinks of Him. The Devil mocks Jesus, saying: "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But Jesus answers: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:3-4). The self-righteous chief priests, scribes, and elders scoff at Jesus on the cross: "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him come down now from the cross and we will believe in Him. He trusts in God; let God deliver Him now, if He desires Him" (Matt 27:42-43). The Devil and the unbelieving world mock our LORD and they scoff at His teachings. The Devil and the unbelieving world continue mocking and scoffing at you, our Lord's Christians, for following this teacher at all costs.

Jesus has compassion on the crowd, but He does not say: "Go in peace, be warmed and filled" without giving them the things needed for the body (James 2:16). The disciples had already witnessed Jesus's feeding of the 5,000, so feeding 4,000 shouldn't have been too hard to believe. Yet the disciples say: "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?" Jesus asks about the number of loaves to prove the point: He's going to feed the 4,000 people with just seven loaves of bread and a few fish. Jesus doesn't create the bread as He did

the rest of creation, *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. He doesn't command the stones to become bread. He takes the work of man's hands, the toil of his labors, the bread and the fish, and increases and multiplies them on the face of the earth. Jesus takes the little that's there and miraculously feeds the 4,000 so abundantly at the hands of the apostles that there were seven basket fulls remaining.

You see this kind of abundance in all of creation, which itself is miraculous. People simply don't realize it. Most take for granted that seedtime and harvest will remain, along with cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night. God's good order is enjoyed by all, but Christians recognize how miraculous it is. Every time seed falls into the ground and then produces thirty, or sixty or a hundred fold, you see the miraculous working of God. The fact that man works cursed ground and from it and the sweat of his brow is able to eat bread is a miraculous gift of God. Oh that the LORD would give us eyes of faith to see the miracles throughout creation and render praise and thanksgiving unto our maker! When Jesus miraculously feeds the 4,000, He is simply speeding up the processes by which He works every day in the order of creation.

But again, the feeding of the 4,000 is not so much about satisfaction of bodily, temporal, and earthly needs. The point is that the people sought first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and the LORD added to this blessing everything they needed to support this body and life. They were ready to face the heat of the day and the cold of the night, the scorching sun or the pouring rain, if only they could be clothed with the righteousness of Christ. They were willing to suffer thirst in that desert place if only they could drink that living water. They were prepared to starve to death if only they could hear the words of eternal life from the mouth of Jesus. The crowd sought first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and everything else they needed was added to them. They focused on what is primary—the preaching of God's

Word—and the LORD saw to it that they didn't lack the secondary necessities of the body. The crowd was starving, not for the bread that perishes, but for the bread from Heaven. And so Jesus, who Himself *is* the living bread from Heaven, fed them in both body and soul to life everlasting.

Of course, in His mercy our LORD continues coming to you in His Word and in His Supper. Whenever you gather with fellow believers in the name of Christ, there is Christ among you. He comes to you in His Word, preached faithfully and spoken among the faithful, and proclaimed in the Absolution. He comes to you with His body in the bread and with His blood in the wine, that you might eat, drink, and live. As Jesus miraculously fed the 5,000, and then the 4,000, so does He continue to feed Christians at all times and places, at altars the world over. He is the living bread from heaven, the Savior, who comes as food divine, concealed in earthly bread and wine, to give faith to every wavering soul and to make each wounded spirit whole. How could we not give up everything else to feed on this bread of life? In comparison to Him, everything else is of no matter.

For three days the crowd had been with Jesus, hanging on to His every word. For three days they neglected their own temporal welfare that they might receive eternal blessings from our LORD. Even so was our Lord Jesus Christ three days in the belly of the earth, without food or drink. He gave up everything in His death on the cross, all bodily, temporal, and earthly goods, that He might win for you spiritual, eternal and heavenly benefits. For three days His body languished in the grave, but on the third day, He rose again from the dead, in His body, never to die again. Our LORD Jesus Christ humbled Himself; He emptied Himself of whatever earthly attachments He could have laid claim to, and so He was highly exalted. Jesus was faithful unto death that He might win for you the crown of life.

Like our LORD, Christians are called upon to be willing to put on the line every blessing the LORD has given us. The world considers this utter foolishness and fanaticism, but it's the example we have in our LORD and the example we have from God's people throughout the Scriptures. With Christians the world over, we sing to our God: "Earth has no pleasure I would share. Yea, heav'n itself were void and bare If thou, Lord, wert not near me." It's all about being in the presence of Jesus Christ, no matter the cost, who comes to us, no matter the cost. This wisdom of God is considered foolishness by the unbelieving world. Those who are not willing to give up their bodily, temporal, and earthly blessings for the Word of God in this life will never be able to experience the spiritual, eternal, and heavenly blessings the LORD has in store for all those who trust in Him. But those who are willing to give up their bodily, temporal, and earthly blessings for the sake of God's Word here in time will reap their reward, beginning already now in this life and continuing in the life to come. Then, temporal suffering will give way to eternal glory. "And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To Him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen." (1 Pet 5:10–11).

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