

Mark 8:1–9
Trinity VII
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
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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,

There are at least two distinct mass feedings in the Gospel accounts. In Mark 6, we hear about the feeding of the 5,000. That's when there were 12 baskets of bread left. Now just two chapters later we hear about the feeding of the 4,000. With the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus had compassion on the people of Israel because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So He taught them and fed them. Here, in the feeding of the 4,000, Jesus has compassion on the crowds because they had already gone three days listening to the LORD's teachings but with no earthly bread to eat. They were focused on God's Word above all else. Jesus cares about their suffering and He wants to help them. So Jesus provides for the people, showing us that He who can do all things can also do all things for you.

In those days, when *again* a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples to Him. "Again" means this has happened before. As usual, the crowds were flocking to Jesus. And as already noted, the feeding of the 5,000 had already occurred. The disciples had already seen with their very eyes how Jesus could miraculously provide more than enough food for a multitude. You would think that would be enough for them to know what was going to happen here, but it wasn't. So often it's the case that God provides for His people but His people forget. We take for granted that our LORD created us, that He preserves us and always has our best interest in mind. When things get tough again, we tend to forget how much the LORD has done for us. But Jesus has compassion not only on the hungry crowds. He also has

compassion on His disciples. He patiently teaches them lessons about His gracious provision. That's what Jesus does for us as well. We tend to forget the good things the LORD does for us, but He continues providing for us and teaching us.

Jesus said to the disciples: "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat." Jesus looks upon the suffering of all people, whether that suffering is physical or spiritual in nature, and Jesus has compassion. He's moved with pity and has a visceral reaction to the suffering He sees. He feels it in His gut. You might compare it to the feeling you get when you think about the suffering of loved ones or when you know someone is headed in the wrong direction. It's what the father felt for the prodigal son.

This compassion Jesus feels for the crowd is the same kind of compassion that caused Him to come to earth in the first place. God looked upon our pitiable state, dead in our trespasses and sins, and at the right time God became man to save us. His great love and compassion for lost humanity caused Him to come to this earth to seek and to save that which was lost. His compassion for all people without exception is what led Him to come to this world to die on the cross for our sins and for the sins of the whole world. Compassion is what led our LORD from His place of honor in Heaven to a place of shame in His suffering and death on the cross on our behalf. Our LORD is all about compassion, about joining His people in their suffering and fully taking our suffering upon Himself in His passion, in His suffering and death.

To help the crowd, Jesus would work through His disciples. The disciples said to Jesus: "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?" The task was impossible, at least according to man's reckoning and human reason. Seven loaves could barely feed the disciples. How could they feed 4,000 people? With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible. Jesus had already proven He could miraculously feed the multitude with

the feeding of the 5,000. If He could feed the 5,000 then He could feed the 4,000 as well. But the disciples still had their doubts. How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place? Our fallen human reason so often gets the best of us. We know the LORD can provide in a miraculous way. But it just doesn't seem possible right now. But it's exactly at that point, when we come to our wit's end, that Jesus begins to work. When we are weak, then is He strong. His power is perfected in our weakness.

The disciples of Jesus today in the Church today often ask a similar question. How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place? Look at all the people in need, not just locally but around the world. Look at all the people who desperately need the bread of God's Word, but they don't even realize it. Consider all the people out there, known and unknown, who need a church family but don't have one. Think of all the people you know who seem to have everything put together but on the inside they're torn to pieces. They don't know where to go or where to turn for help. So many have come from far away only to starve in the wilderness. Even if all physical needs are met beyond measure, in the great spiritual desert where we live, in this desolate place, we don't have enough bread to feed these people. We have compassion for the suffering and the lost. We want to help others, but we ourselves are lacking.

Jesus, however, miraculously feeds the multitude and He does it through us. He does it through His disciples. Jesus asked: "How many loaves do you have?" They said: "Seven." Jesus could have created *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, as He did at creation. He could have turned stones into bread as He turned water into wine. But instead Jesus takes the bread that the disciples already have. He works with the resources they have, with the seven loaves and the few fish.

In a similar way, Jesus works with the resources He's already given you. Even if you think you have little to give to the poor, you can recognize that the little you do have is a gift

from God. Give Him thanks and distribute freely as it has freely been given to you. The LORD has blessed you that you might be a blessing to others. What little you have can become something powerful in the LORD's hands.

It's the same with the bread of God's Word. You might think you don't know enough of the Bible to help someone. You'd be surprised at how God can work through the bits of Scripture you do know to change hearts and minds. Even if you can't see it happening, the Holy Spirit is working in the Word abundantly. He's taking the little crumbs you have and miraculously feeding the multitudes. That's not an excuse to stop storing up God's Word and treasuring it more and more in your heart. Just know that God uses even the weakest and most simple of Christians to proclaim His glory. As the power of God is made manifest in the weakness of the cross, so is the power of God made manifest in the weakness of His Christians.

Jesus directed the crowd to sit down. They would now have a full view of the miracle about to take place. He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, giving us an example, that we too might never forget to thank the LORD even for the little that we do have. Even that little bit is a gift from His generous hand and He who gives in moderation can just as well give in abundance. Jesus then distributed the loaves to the crowd by the hands of the disciples. And the same with the few small fish. Not only did Jesus take what the disciples had and use it for His glory, He also distributed those gifts through them. God increases what He's already given us and then He serves others through us. He is the host and the chef, we His disciples are the waiters and waitresses. We have the honor of blessing others and bringing them the Word of God. It's not our word, it's not our reasoning or our convictions. Every good and perfect gift comes from God and He gives those gifts to others through us.

At the same time, Jesus works through other disciples to serve us. Sometimes instead of serving, it's our turn to be served. Instead of helping others, we need help. Instead of proclaiming God's Word, we need God's Word proclaimed to us. Often all this is happening at the same time. While serving the crowds, we're also seated at the feet of Jesus and receiving God's Word from the disciples. In Christian humility, we recognize our need and we thank the LORD for serving us through fellow Christians. As God takes the little He's given us and blesses others through us, so does God take the little He's given to others and blesses us through them so that "Christ is all in all. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts" (Col 3:11–12). As Jesus has compassion on you, so you have compassion on others. As He is patient with you, so you be patient with others. As the LORD has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

All the people ate and were satisfied. Our LORD Jesus Christ miraculously worked to feed His people through what little He had given the disciples. The LORD continues feeding you, not only in body but in spirit. He gives you here today the bread of God's Word, and the miraculous bread of His body, not only to keep for yourself, but to receive with thanksgiving that you might then be equipped to be a blessing to others. Jesus knows your need and the needs of all people. He has compassion on you and He gives you exactly what you need in abundance. Come, taste and see that the LORD is good. 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.