

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Eighth Sunday after Trinity, August 2, 2009

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Hymns: 43, 264:4, 25: 1-3, 284, 48

Lessons: Isaiah 55: 1-5, Romans 8: 35-39, Mark 6: 30-44.

Text: Matthew 14: 13-22.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Jesus was preaching and healing people of their diseases. He was really not only healing their physical diseases, but more importantly, he was also healing those who repented and believed in him as the Messiah from the deadly spiritual disease of sin. And whenever he preached, whatever he was talking about kept the people's attention. They kept listening to him, and wanted to hear more. It was not as if his sermon was getting too long. His hearers just didn't want to leave and go home. But on this occasion, Jesus' disciples realized that the people were getting hungry. In our sermon today we see that

JESUS PROVIDES FOOD

- 1. In our sermon text, Jesus provides earthly food.**
- 2. Jesus also offers heavenly, spiritual food.**
- 3. What kind of food do we eat?**

Crowds were following Jesus. He was healing them and preaching. It was getting to be late in the day. Jesus' disciples came to him and pointed out that Jesus should send the crowds away so they can go the villages and buy themselves some food. Jesus had a simple answer: *"You give them something to eat."* But the disciples of Jesus objected that they didn't have enough food. *"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.*

John records that one of Jesus' disciples found a boy who had this food. Probably the fish were preserved in some way. We are not told how big these fish were. Of course, if we did know the size of the fish, it really wouldn't make any difference. Perhaps they were intended to be the lunch for the boy and his friends or family. Not very many people could have adequate sustenance for even one meal from 5 loaves of bread and two fish. Remember that their bread was often small, flat loaves, perhaps much like the pita bread we eat today.

But Jesus feeds more than 5000 people from this tiny amount of food, as the Word of God tells us: *"The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children."* This was truly a miracle. He did something with almost nothing. How often haven't those of you who prepare meals had to stretch the meals a little bit when some unexpected company comes or stays for a meal at the last moment? I've seen it, and experienced it, and I have even shared those meals that you have prepared. Now this was more than just an earthly meal, more than just stretching the food that was on the table. This was more than just adding a little water to the gravy or putting another potato in the pot. This is more than just getting out another loaf of bread or another pound of hamburger or some more vegetables. This is a true miracle – supplying food for more than 5000 people! Jesus truly made something appear where it wasn't there before – something that nourished their bodies.

But we must also emphasize that Jesus provides spiritual food. He offers it to all men. Isaiah today in our Old Testament lesson expressed that invitation. The spiritual food God offers is in His Word, the Bible. He has given us in the Word of God everything that we need for our spiritual welfare. At its simplest, even a child can understand it. Peter talks about the milk of the Word in 1 Peter 2:2-3 *"Like newborn babies, crave pure*

spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good". But as a person grows, he or she needs and wants more than just milk. We need solid food. We must grow, as the Hebrew Christians are admonished: ***"In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."*** Hebrews 5:12-14.

Jesus provides everything, from the gospel of eternal life to sustenance and guidance for our daily lives. The summary of the Gospel says: Jesus died for my sins. As soon as a child can speak, he can say those words. But even before a child can speak, we believe that God can work faith in children. That is why we baptize infants.

Are we limiting the power of the word of God? Are we ignoring the pantry full of food that God provides for us? Are we ignoring all that is in God's refrigerator and letting it get moldy? Are we ignoring the full pantry, the full refrigerator, the full deepfreeze, the full granary or barn of God's Word? God has given us this abundant amount of food. He has provided everything from the simplest Gospel that a child can hear and believe, to the strong meat of God's Word. When I mention the doctrines of church fellowship and unionism we usually think of "strong meat". Some of you will say "Yes, such teachings are somewhat difficult to understand." My sinful flesh makes it hard to understand. My sinful flesh doesn't want to accept such teachings from God. But what God teaches is clear. That too, is part of God's abundant spread of spiritual food.

Have you ever thought of the Lord's Prayer in terms of a menu? We shouldn't think of the Lord's Prayer as a menu from which we get to pick and choose, but as a banquet of all that has been given to us to eat. Look at all that we are asking for in the Lord's Prayer – and all that God provides! We have the whole contents of what Christ wants us to ask for and use. And Isaiah emphasizes what it will cost us: ***"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost."*** Isaiah 55:1. It will cost us nothing but believing in God. Think about the table of contents of God's food menu. How often don't we treat God's food menu like a restaurant menu? We think we can afford only one item, so we don't order everything that is on page one, and pages 2, 3, and 4. Isaiah this morning invited us to come and buy water, and buy bread – even though we have nothing to pay for it with.

What would we eat, what do we eat, when we have a free, all-you can eat buffet? Maybe that's what we should compare God's spread to – the menu at an all-you can eat buffet. My point is that we have a whole raft of things, a whole table full, a whole buffet restaurant of what God offers us. What are we really hungry for, and what do we end up eating at that buffet? I am going to assume that you have been at some kind of buffet, where you have a choice of many things to eat. Perhaps the forerunner of today's all-you-can-eat restaurant was the church pot-luck dinner, where all sorts of good things are there to eat. Even children have observed that we find the best food at those kinds of gatherings!

We may on occasion go to hear some lecture. We may even pay to hear an all-day lecture. For many of us, our employers have sent us to listen to some presentation for a whole day or more. They pay the lecturer and it is important enough that they also pay your wages for you to listen. Of course, they expect you to learn something from listening. On the other hand, how often don't we just plop down and listen and really don't get much from what we hear. Well, we sometimes even listen AND watch for hours at a time. Yes, I am thinking of television. Sometimes what we see and hear on television is pretty exciting. Things are always changing on the screen, the pictures, the sound, the music. Now that makes church pretty boring by comparison, doesn't it? But the television, or movies, or music we hear are all feeding us what they want us to have.

What kind of food do we eat? What kind of food do we want to eat? What do we eat from God's buffet? You have seen children at all-you-can-eat meals. Perhaps you have even let your own children choose exactly what they want to put on their plates. What are they going to take? What do they want to eat? Only what they think of as "the good stuff". They usually pick what they think will taste good, what they think they will like. They don't necessarily pick and eat what is good for them, like the vegetables or the salads, and other healthier foods unless they have been taught to do so.

What do we end up eating from God's spiritual buffet? What do we pick and choose? When we do eat spiritual food, isn't it often a matter of picking and choosing? That is our sinful flesh. That is the influence of the devil, who says, Ah, take the stuff that tastes good. Take the stuff that is easy to eat. Take the stuff that looks good. But we can be deceived and misled. I remember that when I was much younger, I took a huge helping of what looked like one of my favorite foods at a church pot-luck dinner. It turned out to be one of my least favorite foods. The devil and our sinful flesh don't want to select what is good for our spiritual welfare. What do we pick? Do we pick the strong meat? Or do we grab the stuff that is fun, or easy, or pretty on the plate? Do we save the hard things for other people to eat and digest?

What kind of spiritual foods do we really eat? Our sinful flesh says: "Take that stuff" and argues "No, no, no, it isn't really junk food." But our new man says: "Feed me the stuff that is good for me. Feed me the really good stuff. Feed me what I need for my spiritual welfare."

But how often don't we just nibble at God's buffet, because of the other food that is available in the world? What other spiritual food is offered? Much of what pretends to be "spiritual food" today is just the baby food of the world – the junk food of the devil – the candy and sweets of the world, the spiritual garbage that rots our spiritual teeth. Then of course, when we get some spiritual cavities, we quickly rush and get a fix of spiritual food, but we don't get at the cause or root of the problem: we don't eat all the spiritual food Jesus provides. Yes, this is law preaching: The third commandment says "Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy. What does this mean? We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and his Word but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it."

We must put all our confidence and love in God so that we don't look down on and despise preaching and the Word of God; so that we don't ignore that Word of God, but regard it as valuable, treasure it, let it become part of our daily menu that we really eat and enjoy, that we make it part of our everyday menu. But how hard isn't that to do? I find that hard to do. Sometimes when we don't have the whole family at the table for supper, I skip reading our daily devotion, perhaps out of laziness. What kind of example is that from me to you?

I want to remind you today of the good spiritual food that Jesus Christ offers. Jesus is not going to put any harmful additives in the food he provides us. He is not going to give us the harmful, poisonous garbage that the devil puts into our spiritual food.

This morning we have seen Jesus providing earthly food, which reminds us of the spiritual food, the good food, the nutritious food he offers. He wants us to eat it every day, he wants us to make it part of our daily menu to nourish us unto eternal life. Surely Jesus provides both earthly and spiritual food. We know that some, perhaps many of those people whom Jesus fed both earthly food and spiritual food that day fell away from him. We know how that happens. We look at the empty pews around us. We know that those kinds of things happen.

But dare we trust, dare we risk our eternal life, our eternal salvation to junk food? We know that Jesus paid the price of eternal hell to offer us eternal life. We have learned that Jesus Christ is the only salvation we have. Jesus has food on his buffet that we haven't even learned about! Follow the invitation of the Psalmist: ***"Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him."*** Psalm 34:8. Amen.